UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# NEGOTIATION OF AUTONOMY IN THE LOCAL ROCK MUSIC INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY

BY

JENNIFER A. BELL ©

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled NEGOTIATION OF AUTONOMY IN THE LOCAL ROCK MUSIC INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY submitted by JENNIFER A. BELL in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

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## Abstract

The rise of Independent record labels and the availability of home-recording equipment increasingly enable the production of original-music recordings by unsigned rock musicians. Though expensive and time-consuming, the Independent recording can be a strategic investment designed to attract the interest of major record labels. To record independently, musicians struggle to secure resources to compose, record, distribute and promote Independent albums, and to earn a reputation as talented, self-sufficient musicians worthy of investment by major labels. For those who wish to pursue record deals and concurrently practice music as an occupation, a viable option is to perform for tavern audiences. In this thesis I present findings from five in-depth interviews with males who pursue careers as original musicians, but simultaneously earn a living and secure recording resources by performing cover songs in an Edmonton tavern. I begin with a review of some paradigmatic approaches to the study of popular music in particular and culture generally, and locate the present study in an interpretive, structuralist perspective. Conceived as an active, critical agent, the tavern rock-musician is understood as both enabled and constrained by the cultural logics of the creative habitus.

The analysis is presented in two parts. In the first I explore ways in which the logics of the tavern gig both enable and constrain the pursuit of original-music ventures. I illustrate various structurally-grounded strategies by which musicians struggle to attract the interest of record labels and concurrently enact an audience-oriented tavern performance. With restricted access to resources thought necessary to pursue original-music recordings and constrained in these pursuits by the logics of the tavern performance, the musicians are understood as occupying a structurally subordinate position. The second part of the analysis reveals however that musicians appropriate and interpret the sonic, visual and verbal dimensions of the performance code in such ways that enable the pursuit of original, creative expression. Throughout the analysis I suggest ways in which the interpretive frameworks of the musicians both enable and constrain creative practices and serve to reproduce the logics of the creative habitus.

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# Chapter One: Paradigmatic Approaches to the Study of Popular Music

> We never seem to get close enough to those who produce and consume (popular music) to understand what the music means to these people. What I am suggesting is that we attempt to do just that. Therein, I suspect, lies the answer to a successful study of popular music and its place in the social world (Lewis, 1983: 140).

Although the Canadian popular music scene has begun to attract the interest of sociologists, there are surprisingly few ethnographic studies of the local production of popular music. Ethnographers have traditionally approached musical communities as "sub"- or "counter-cultures", wherein music is understood primarily from the perspective of consumption. When the musician is of concern, it is usually within the context of the "star-system" of rock. Within a Canadian context, popular music is often studied in terms of the "crisis" of regionalism and recent funding and policy initiatives.

In this chapter I want to situate the present study a) within a body of literature concerning the Canadian popular music industry, to offer an introduction to some issues of concern to Canadian sociologists; and b) within general paradigmatic approaches to the study of popular music. I hope to show that ethnographic research of the local production of popular music is lacking, and that the research being done fails to address the issues of concern to the local level rock musician.

## 1. The Canadian popular music industry

Sociological studies of popular music are lacking within a Canadian context (Shepherd, 1991: 253). Some attribute the lack of interest to the short history of a Canadian music scene; only in the last 20 years has a distinctively "Canadian" popular music industry emerged.

A recent issue of Cultural Studies exemplifies some of the issues and debates of concern to those writing on the Canadian popular music scene (1991). Though of only peripheral relevance for the present study, it is useful to examine some of the key issues and debates currently ongoing in this field. In what follows, I draw in particular on Jody Berland's (1991) article on the implications of the Free Trade Agreement for the Canadian music industry, and on Robert Wright's (1991) article on the Canadian recording industry and issues of cultural protectionism, written also in the context of Free Trade. This work is particularly informative as it addresses issues raised by recent government policy and funding initiatives, and articulates ways in which those are thought

to both enable and constrain Canadian musicians in their pursuit of original-music recording success. I introduce these debates specifically to provide a context for understanding local rock musicians within the Canadian and international recording industries, and use them also as a vehicle to argue for the timeliness of research conducted at the local level of music production.

The most recent debates in the literature concern funding and policy initiates on behalf of the Canadian government. Unlike other cultural institutions, the record industry in this country has not until very recently been of concern to the Canadian government. Two factors are thought to account for the resistance to invest in this industry. First, the popular music market has been dominated by multinational recording labels (Berland, 1991; Wright, 1991); and secondly, before the Canadian government could take popular music seriously, it had to be taken seriously by the recording industry itself (Dotter, 1987).

At the turn of the century in the US and England, popular music was considered to be "outside of the commodity market", or within it only marginally in the forms of tavern singing, amateur performance and minstrelism (Buxton, 1983: 94-95). Even with the institutionalization of popular music in the 1950s (Etzkorn, 1976), record companies were initially opposed to investing in this music, and in rock in particular. Resistance was premised on the belief that rock was too vulgar, espoused anti-authoritarian lyrics, and "sounded black" (Dotter, 1987: 31). Only with the emergence of the Beatles, when the international music industry realized the potential of the untapped youth market, did major Canadian labels begin to consider rock as profitable (Dotter, 1987).

Recent government interest in Canadian popular music industries is due in part then to the realization of the commercial viability of the music. The issue of dominance by multinational labels remains however, and is taken up below.

The Canadian federal government began to offer direct subsidies to the recording industry for the first time in the mid-1980s. A $25 million grant was invested through the Sound Recording Development Program (SRDP), to be distributed over a five year period (Berland, 1991; Wright, 1991). This and other subsidies, in the form of grants and interest-free loans, were coupled with broadcasting and sound recording policy initiatives. These initiatives were intended to address the problem of cultural protectionism, raised by the dominance in the industry of multinational labels (Wright, 1991).

Perhaps the most discussed and controversial policy initiative is Canadian Content Legislation (CANCON). CANCON requires a

certain percentage of radio broadcasting to include Canadian music (Brown, 1991)[1]. The implementation of CANCON legislation has, some argue, lead to the "ghettoization" of Canadian music, thereby undermining its initial objectives. This might best be understood by first considering in more detail the nature of those objectives.

As mentioned, the Canadian record industry has historically been dominated by foreign companies, and by the US in particular (Garofalo, 1991). In 1985, for example, "foreign control of Canada-wide record distribution became absolute: 100 per cent" (Berland, 1991: 322). As subsidiaries of multinational companies, major Canadian labels have had only marginal autonomy to sign local talent (Wright, 1991). Unlike its US counterpart, the primary concern of the Canadian industry has been to provide a market for foreign products. Because the recruitment, production and promotion of local talent has been only marginal, there has been concern for the preservation of regional music. Both funding and policy initiatives on behalf of the Canadian government were intended to foster a strong indigenous Canadian recording industry (Wright, 1991).

The problems raised by the implementation of CANCON stem from a contradiction between those objectives and the dominance of multinational labels, a contradiction linked to the "Americanization" of Canadian popular music. In order for the production of an album to be economically viable it must break into an international market (Wright, 1991). The Canadian national market, ten times smaller than the American market (Garofalo, 1991), does not offer sufficient returns to justify the initial investment (Berland, 1991).

Because American companies dominate the Canadian industry, music which can expect to be economically viable must be Americanized, or "made to fit the US formula" (Brown, 1991: 351). Not only are marketing categories defined by the US market, but Canadian musicians who want international success are themselves groomed for the US market (Buxton, 1991; Garofalo, 1991; Rutten, 1991). In order to attract major record label interest, Canadian musicians must produce music

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[1]To meet CANCON criteria, a Canadian musician must have either performed the instrumentation or lyrics, written the lyrics, or the song must have been recorded at a live performance in Canada (Wright, 1991). In 1971 AM radio was legislated to play at least 30% Canadian content; CANCON legislation was applied to FM radio in 1975, and though the percentage fluctuates, it is also around 30% (Berland, 1991). MuchMusic, the most effective promotional venue for Canadian musicians, is also under CANCON legislation (Garofalo, 1991).

which is economically viable in the international market. American-owned companies based in Canada look for an "American" sound; while homogenization improves musicians' chances for success in an international market, it is thought to threaten the preservation of "Canadian" culture (Rutten, 1991; Wright, 1991)[2].

Both the export of musicians to the US and the Americanization of original music within Canada make it difficult for Canadian broadcasters to fulfil CANCON requirements. There is a shortage of music which satisfies CANCON criteria, and as a result, broadcasters are impelled to give air-play to second-rate music (Wright, 1991). Because this music is given hit-status, the major international labels are left with the perception of Canadian music as inferior. This results in what Wright (1991) calls the "ghettoization" of Canadian music (314), in which it becomes increasingly difficult for even top-rate Canadian musicians to achieve international hit status.

As a result, major labels may be hesitant to invest in local talent. Though there is little evidence to support Rutten's (1991) suggestion that this might lead to a decline in local composition, performance and recording, those writing on the current state of Canadian popular music suggest that we turn our efforts toward understanding music production at the local level. This recommendation, and hence, partial justification for the present study, comes most strongly from Rutten (1991), who suggests that the focus of study should shift from debates over the effectiveness of CANCON legislation to local music composition, performance, recording, air-play and distribution, and the politics involved in each. This would, according to Rutten, bring Canadian scholars into the realms of "mass communication, culture and democracy, and away from the politics of narrow-minded cultural nationalism" (1991: 295)[3].

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[2]Furthermore, aspiring Canadian musicians have typically found greater success by relocating to the US (Berland, 1991; Wright, 1991); Brown (1991) cites Loverboy, The Spoons, Honeymoon Suite and Saga as examples.

[3]Rutten is responding to the recent emphasis of Canadian studies on debates over the 'proper' kinds of music to be protected by federal government policy initiatives. It would be naive to suggest, in this age of globalization, that studies should focus only on local scenes. Rutten admits that local scenes must be situated in transnational contexts; further, there is no evidence in the literature for a trend toward the exclusive focus on localized industries; Straw (1991) for example anticipates the future direction of

A focus on localized music industries is particularly timely; the majority of Canadian musicians are not signed by major labels (Wright, 1991). Given the priorities of those labels, if regional music and distinctively "Canadian" music cultures are to be discovered and studied (and preserved), they are going to be found at the local level.

According to Shepherd (1991), local independent labels are on the rise. Just as questions of artistic autonomy (with respect to the preservation of regional sounds) are of interest at the national and international level, so too are they of interest at the local level[4]. Independent labels offer Canadian musicians increased autonomy in the composition, recording, production, distribution and promotion of their original music. This, coupled with the autonomy afforded the musician by the increased availability of home-recording equipment, is beginning to weaken direct relations of dependence on major multinational record labels (Shepherd, 1991).

Based on the preceding discussion then, I argue that research must turn to the local production of popular music. While the political-economic perspective helps us to understand the implications of internationalization and funding and policy initiatives for the local production of music, the domain of production is also symbolic, cultural, and ideological. Unsigned musicians participate in and reproduce the logics of symbolic codes of popular music, and are both constrained and enabled by the culture of the spaces in which rock music is produced.

In the following sections I review other approaches to popular music research. These include "historic", "interactive", and "critical" paradigms as suggested by Lewis (1983), as well as research which approaches the musical community as "subculture" and the rock musician as "superstar". I discuss

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Canadian studies to turn even more toward domestic and global manufacturing and distribution, and related concerns for economic viability.

[4]The struggle for artistic autonomy has been revealed in research of most cultural institutions. Dimaggio (1977) suggests that the autonomy of the artist will depend in part on the degree of competition in the industry. When major companies have oligopolistic control, artists have minimal autonomy; in a market characterized by competition among organizations artists have greater roles in production and recording (438). Managers in culture industries want prediction and control, leading to tensions with artists who want creative autonomy.

criticisms of each approach, and then suggest a research agenda able to study the cultural logics of music production at the local level.

## 2. Historic, interactive and critical approaches

This survey is first organized in terms of three general approaches to the study of popular music as suggested by Lewis (1983): historic, interactive and critical. The "historic" approach is traced to Weber's (1918) "The Rational And Social Foundations of Music", in which "art music" is understood "as a manifestation of 'rational' social relationships" (Lewis, 1983: 133). Retaining Weber's focus on the effects of music on social structure, recent studies: a) attempt to link taste cultures to class; b) construct histories of styles; and c) conduct content analyses of popular lyrics. Secondly, Lewis locates the origins of the "interactive" perspective in Georg Simmel's (1982) "Psychological and Ethnological Studies on Music". Using primarily participant observation, this approach focuses on artists and audiences, and on uses and gratifications. Finally, the "critical" approach, inspired by Theodor Adorno's (1959) work on the "culture industry", is concerned with the commodification of culture and understanding popular music as a cultural product.

Lewis is critical of these approaches on a number of accounts. First, there is a tendency for historic studies to focus on the content of musical forms at the expense of the study of their appropriation and reception; further, they are premised on assumptions of "rational" social relationships and homogenized class and social structures. Second, the uses and gratifications studies of the interactive perspective neglect the study of politics and asymmetrical relations of power. Finally, the critical approach is criticized for subordinating music "to economic demands and (divorcing) it from aesthetic considerations" (Lewis, 1983: 134). According to Lewis, critical studies:

> ...usually conclude with an ideological pitch to junk the industry because of its exploitative nature. However, they are usually at a loss to suggest how this might be done (1983: 134).

Although Lewis suggests that studies of popular music have turned away from the preoccupation of the 1960s and 70s with economic and political issues, studies of the commodification of popular music continue to dominate the literature. Discussing the relation of rock music to consumerism, for example, Buxton (1983) articulates the common concern that rock, "in spite of its apparent desire to be a vehicle for rebellion, (has) somehow become a valuable corporate interest" (94).

Studies of popular music cannot neglect the critical

activities of reception and appropriation, the political and asymmetrical relations of power involved in production, distribution and reception, and the aesthetic or symbolic cultural constitution of popular music and the sites of its production. Two other paradigmatic approaches to the study of popular music, the "subculture" and "superstar" perspectives, are discussed below. While both dominate the literature, I argue that neither is adequate for understanding the local production of popular music, and conclude by discussing the approach taken in the present study.

## 3. "Subculture" and "superstar" approaches

A number of sociological studies of popular music are organized around the notion of "subculture"; musical communities in Britain, such as the punks, mods and teddyboys have been studied for their style, language and music (Hebdige, 1979; Levine & Stumpf, 1983). Naturalistic studies of youth subcultures dominated the work of the 1920s and 30s Chicago School (Billington, Strawbridge, Greensides, & Fitzsimons, 1991; Levine & Stumpf, 1983), and in the 1950s and 60s youth subcultures were understood from a "crime perspective", studied as delinquent and deviating from the ideology of the dominant culture (Levine & Stumpf, 1983).

Subculture approaches, and in particular those from a deviance perspective, are problematic first for assuming the homogeneity of both "sub" and "dominant" culture, and secondly, at least in early studies, for normative assumptions or "moral gatekeeping"; "sub" implies not only difference from, but also subordination to "dominant" culture. Of more immediate concern for the present study is the fact that subculture studies focus less on the actual production of music than they do on the symbolic use of the music within communities[5]. An alternative to the subculture perspective is that which takes as a focus the musician as "superstar".

The rock musician has been typified and studied as a cultural symbol within the context of the "star-system" (Arnett, 1991; Buxton, 1983: 96; Dotter, 1987). From this perspective, the most successful musicians are understood as "culture heros" or "superstars" (Dotter, 1987: 26; Weinstein, 1991). Research has

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[5]It could be argued that local musicians themselves participate in a certain subculture. While such an approach would enable the study of the symbolic cultural community in which local music production takes place, it is misleading to impose a conceptual framework that constitutes the musicians as opposing "dominant" cultural groups. There is little evidence to support the homogeneity and distinct group boundaries on which such an approach would be based.

attempted to explain the construction of the musician-as-star through mass media exposure, an agenda of increasing salience, given that by the 1960s, the rock star had replaced the film star as "the dominant star-figure" (Buxton, 1983: 98).

Conceiving the rock musician as "superstar" is problematic given that this conception excludes from study the majority of popular musicians. According to Weinstein (1991), at most only 15% of American rock musicians ever sign a record deal, and the chances of making it to "stardom" once signed are significantly less. Most rock musicians compose and perform locally, drawing on localized music industries for their start. Of those local bands in Liverpool, for example, less than 1% sign deals with major record labels (Cohen, 1991: 336). While conceiving the rock musician as culture hero is useful for understanding the reproduction of cultural symbols, this approach does not adequately address issues of direct concern to the "typical" rock musician.

4. An alternative approach to the study of local music production

As mentioned above, Rutten (1991) recommends that research be pursued at the local level of production. Most musicians do not reach "superstar" status, and the present study of tavern musicians is meant to explore a site where many musicians begin their career. Of specific concern are the strategies through which the unsigned tavern musician, aspiring to make it as an original artist, pursues artistic originality while accommodating the audience-oriented demands of the tavern circuit. The tavern musician experiences a rather ambiguous space between the tavern performance and the original-music scene; to make sense of this space he interprets sonic, visual and verbal codes, and relations with key players in each field: in the realm of performance these include the audience, the tavern manager and booking agent; in his original-music pursuits he deals with recording, production, distribution and media figures.

Priority is given in this ethnographic study to the narrative accounts through which tavern musicians tell their stories. Interpretations reveal ways in which they make sense of their position within the structural configuration of the music industry and the asymmetrical relations of power characteristic of it. Strategies are revealed through which musicians pursue artistic originality within the limits of this structure; at the same time it is argued that those strategies may contribute to the reproduction of constraining

structures and relations of domination[6].

In the following chapter I introduce several approaches to the study of culture in general. In doing so I hope to make explicit the traditions out of which the present study comes, outlining a number of influences and presuppositions. In Chapter Three I set forth the methodological strategies which organize the study, and describe the specific techniques of data collection and analysis. I introduce a tripartite methodological framework suggested by John B. Thompson's "depth hermeneutics" (1990). With this framework I demarcate three domains of inquiry, including: the interpretation of doxa, socio-cultural contexts, and internal structures of symbolic forms. Rationale is provided for the relevance of these specific domains to the study of tavern rock musicians. I discuss a number of methodological issues within the context of each domain, and conclude Chapter Three with a brief discussion of issues of authority and ethics in research with human participants.

In chapters Four and Five I provide descriptive and analytic accounts of the research findings. In Chapter Four I introduce the research participants, and tell a story of their structural location within the hierarchy of the music industry. Particular attention is given to the structure of the industry as both enabling and constraining opportunities for the composition, performance and recording of original music. In Chapter Five I depart somewhat from this structural reading to discuss ways in which the research participants pursue artistic originality through the critical appropriation of symbolic codes. The chapter is organized around sonic, visual and verbal codes, and within the context of each I illustrate strategies of symbolic valuation and interpretations of structural location. In the final chapter, I discuss some implications for Canadian popular music research in light of the current findings, and suggest directions for future research.

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[6]The relationship between agency and structure as understood in this study is informed by Giddens' idea that structure "is always both constraining and enabling" (Giddens, 1984: 25; cited in Ritzer, 1992: 432).

## Chapter Two: Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Culture

By contrasting the current study with the political-economic, historic, interactive and critical, and subculture and superstar approaches to the study of popular music, we can see how the former departs from the latter in its focus of inquiry. Debates about the internationalization of Canadian music production and related funding and legislation initiatives are informative, but neglect the cultural logics of local music production; historic, interactive and critical approaches neglect, respectively, reception and appropriation of cultural forms, asymmetrical relations of power and politics, and the aesthetic and symbolic construction of popular music; subculture studies tend to neglect the musician and reify notions of homogeneous cultural groups with distinct boundaries; and the conception of the musician as "superstar" excludes from study the majority of individuals who compose and perform popular music.

Having discussed alternative approaches to the study of popular music, I wish to address a number of approaches to the study of culture in general, and locate each approach within a series of debates which have marked the history of cultural studies. Specifically, this discussion is organized around distinctions between "high" and "popular" or "mass" culture; conceptions of culture as lived experience; and notions of ideology, constraint and resistance. In this chapter I also discuss "the grand narrative of cultural transformation" (Thompson, 1990: 76) and theories of cultural reproduction as two alternative models to the study of culture.

### 1. High, popular and mass culture

Theories of culture are organized in part around conceptions of the production, internal content, and reception of cultural products. Traditionally, distinctions between "high" and "mass" or "popular" cultural products have influenced how each of those processes is conceived, and, further, have had significant implications for normative evaluations of cultural products. Three perspectives, the conservative, radical, and functionalist mass culture critiques, are discussed below, each representing a variation on these conceptions.

#### 1.1. Conservative and radical mass culture critiques

Both conservative and radical mass culture critiques are premised on distinctions between high and mass culture, and on the assumption that each embodies and transmits different values to audiences. High culture is thought to disseminate "proper" values and morals, and mass culture is critically evaluated for disseminating unwholesome and corrupt values, thereby threatening the traditional values and way of life

protected by high culture. Popular, or commercial culture, is produced for mass consumption by a passive, non-discriminating audience.

Conservative critics, such as T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis, understand cultural products to be determined by the vulgar demands of the mass audience (Dimaggio, 1977; Swingewood, 1977). According to Eliot, the mass media "have undermined the organic relation between culturally creative elites and a broad readership" (Swingewood, 1977: 10). The threat posed to traditional "common" culture by second-rate mass culture must be counteracted by the new "minority culture" of the "informed" elite (Swingewood, 1977: 9).

Radical mass culture critics, on the other hand, understand the production of mass culture as a means of social control. Rather than attribute production to the tastes of the masses, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse for example see mass culture as an ideological tool employed in the production of public opinion and the manipulation of political sentiment. Accordingly, the masses have become passive, indifferent and obedient, and are easy prey for "irrational ideologies such as fascism" (Swingewood, 1977: viii). In his work on the 'culture industry', Adorno argues that the rise of entertainment industries lead to the commodification, and thus the rationalization and standardization, of cultural forms. Mass culture is thought to lack the autonomy of traditional art; whereas the latter could "step back" from reality and envision a better life, the pre-established formula employed in the construction of mass culture products negates critical reflection and normalizes the status quo (Thompson, 1990: 100).

### 1.2. Theories of cultural pluralism

A third perspective is that of "cultural pluralism" (Swingewood, 1977: xi). In this account the focus of inquiry shifts from domination, legitimation and cultural unity to everyday "stratified consumption patterns" (Swingewood, 1977: xi). From this perspective "the broader question of the relation of culture to class domination and ideology disappears" (Swingewood, 1977: xi); integration and legitimation are assumed, and the focus turns to the "different levels of taste, different audiences and consumers" generated by consumer capitalism (Swingewood, 1977: 20). Culture is "no longer identified with a dominant ruling class", but rather is understood as a "common, middle-brow culture diffused through the agencies of the mass media" (Swingewood, 1977: 21); a common culture "functionally" caters to the needs of a "vast new middle class" (Swingewood, 1977: 21).

### 1.3. Criticisms

Both the conservative and radical mass culture critics ground their views in nostalgic desires for a return to pre-industrial, pre-capitalistic culture (Swingewood, 1977). They are criticized for adhering to a monolithic conception of culture, and are said to understand the decline of culture without reference to specific determinations and to "historically concrete forms of capitalist culture" (Swingewood, 1977: xi). Thompson (1990) argues that their analyses of culture provide only a partial view of mass communication; a restricted focus on commodification, he claims, neglects the everyday practices, social organization, and differences characteristic of mass production. Further, both perspectives are criticized for their conception of a passive audience; Swingewood (1977) suggests that these theories embody a "pessimistic dismissal of the working class as the too-willing victim of an overpowering reification" (16); similarly, Thompson (1990) argues that any theory of cultural production, transmission and reception must give priority to the active and critical interpretation, appropriation and assimilation of cultural products. Finally, while theories of cultural pluralism turn to consider the uses and gratifications of cultural consumption, this account is only partial in that it neglects the study of the ideological and political construction of cultural products.

### 1.4. Some presuppositions of the present study

The present study is premised on the "postmodern" breakdown of distinctions between "high" and "popular" culture (Jameson, 1990); early concerns of mass culture critics for the degenerative effects of popular culture on passive audiences are replaced by a desire to understand the interpretive strategies employed by active, critical agents who are both enabled and constrained by the logics of cultural practices. Culture is seen as neither imposed from above nor determined by vulgar audience-demands, but is understood rather as symbolic forms and practices grounded in specific ideologically- and politically-configured structures. Such an understanding of culture requires a brief excursion into theories of cultural transformation (Thompson, 1990) and theories of cultural (and social) reproduction.

## 2. Theories of cultural transformation

Theories of cultural transformation have developed in response to the rise of industrial capitalism. According to these theories, with the decline of "religious and magical beliefs and practices", the cultural sphere became increasingly characterized by "the secularization of beliefs and practices and by the progressive rationalization of social life"

(Thompson, 1990: 77). Political action became mobilized not by "reference to other-worldly values or beings", but to "secular belief systems or 'ideologies'" (Thompson, 1990: 77). While "radical revolutionary movements" characterized the "age of ideologies", over time politics increasingly became "a matter of piecemeal reform and the pragmatic accommodation of conflicting interests", thereby negating radical social change (Thompson, 1990: 77).

Thompson is critical of theories of cultural transformation on two accounts. First, cultural transformation is understood in the context of secularization and rationalization, at the expense of understanding the impact of the "mediazation of modern culture" (1990: 82). Second, a "neutral" or "positive" conception of ideology is used, referring to beliefs and symbolic systems arising from secularization. A neutral conception of ideology, however, marginalizes the link between ideology and domination, and deflects attention away from the everyday reception and appropriation of symbolic forms (Thompson, 1990: 83-85).

## 3. Theories of reproduction[7]

### 3.1. Thompson on social reproduction

Thompson also discusses "the general theory of state-organized and ideologically secured social reproduction" (1990: 75). This model suggests a number of mechanisms thought to "secure the reproduction of existing social relations" (Thompson, 1990: 86). Three premises organize this account. First, for social relations to be reproduced, both material conditions and "collectively shared values and beliefs" must be reproduced (Thompson, 1990: 86). Second, a dominant ideology secures actors to a social order. And third, the dominant ideology is produced and diffused by the state in the interest of serving the long-term interests of the dominant class.

Thompson's critique of this model concerns a) assumptions of

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[7]My discussion of theories of reproduction is informed by the work of Thompson (1990) and Jenks (1993). There is however some confusion in this account, resulting in part from the ambiguous character of distinctions between 'social' and 'cultural' reproduction. Jenks (1993) discusses reproduction in the context of Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction and influences of Marxism, Durkheimian sociology, Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, and structuralism. Thompson restricts his discussion to Marx and Althusser. If Thompson is discussing cultural reproduction, why the absence of Bourdieu? And why does the role of ideology occupy only a marginal place in Jenks' discussion of cultural reproduction?

consensus; b) assumptions of social cohesion; and c) a class-reductionist conception of ideology. First, Thompson identifies "core" and "differential" consensus theories; core consensus theories state that all individuals adhere to core values and beliefs. The plausibility of this assertion is questionable, as there is more evidence for descensus than for such broad consensus. The differential consensus theory is more plausible, suggesting that through socialization individuals adhere to role-specific values and beliefs rather than to one set of dominant beliefs (Thompson, 1990: 89). What is problematic in this account however is the conception of the individual as "slave" to socialization; an overemphasis on socialization negates critical interpretation and oppositional attitudes as actors appropriate role-specific values and beliefs.

The second assumption suggests a conception of dominant ideology as "symbolic glue", adhering individuals to the social order. This "social cement theory of ideology" is problematic in that subordinate groups do not necessarily share the same values and beliefs as dominant groups (Thompson, 1990: 90-91). This is, for Thompson, too simple an account of how symbolic forms facilitate social order. As an alternative, Thompson suggests we pursue studies of how individuals in different structural positions make sense of symbolic forms, and how such interpretations create and sustain relations of domination (1990: 92).

The third assumption suggests that the state or agencies of the state produce and diffuse a dominant ideology. Typified by Althusser's notions of repressive and ideological state apparatuses, this perspective "adopts a class-reductionist approach to the modern state" (Thompson, 1990: 92). While traditional Marxist approaches tend to explain the success of cultural domination only by recourse to false consciousness (Larrain, 1991), Althusser acknowledges the influence of other social forms, such as the state, family, and education, on the formation and reproduction of culture, but claims that in the "last instance" ideological state apparatuses serve the interests of the dominant class. Thompson argues however that asymmetrical relations of power are in fact grounded in relations based not only on class, but also on race and gender (1990: 95).

Thompson thus suggests that notions of consensus in reproduction theories are implausible, that the social cement theory of ideology is only partial, and that class-reductionist approaches are mistaken to understand social reproduction on the basis of class exploitation alone.

## 3.2. Jenks on Bourdieu and theories of cultural reproduction

Jenks considers the notion of cultural reproduction to:

> ...articulate the dynamic process that makes sensible the utter contingency of, on the one hand, the stasis and determinacy of social structure and, on the other, the innovation and agency inherent in the practice of social action (1993: 1).

Theories of cultural reproduction were first introduced through the work of Pierre Bourdieu in the 1970s, which reflects influences of Marxism, Durkheimian sociology, Garfinkel's ethnomethodology and structuralism.

The influence of Marxist traditions is evident in Bourdieu's appropriation of the "repressive society", and through the indirect appropriation of notions of "appearance" and "essence"[8]. While social life reveals the appearance of change, the essence (ie. mechanisms of wage-labour exploitation) of social structure is continually reproduced. Contradictions, characteristic of social life, are reproduced through the distorting effects of ideology.

Reworking this notion of "appearance" and "essence", Lévi-Strauss attempts to uncover the strata of cultural phenomena by introducing the geographical metaphor of "depth" and "surface". For Lévi-Strauss, culture includes:

> ...the surface appearances or manifestations of underlying patterns at a deeper level - both within time, the 'synchronic', and through time, the 'diachronic' (Jenks, 1993: 9).

Culture is reproduced through the repetitive, culture-specific use of conventions which overcomes the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and signified. Bourdieu appropriates from structuralism the search for surface illusions and deeper structures through cultural analysis.

Finally, Bourdieu appropriates from Durkheim and Garfinkel an emphasis on consensus in reproduction. For Durkheim, reproduction facilitates the transition from mechanical to organic society; reproduced are the "appropriate collective secular credo(s)" that "ensure reproduction of solidarity in the face of change" (Jenks, 1993: 8). Garfinkel, influenced by Durkheim's "collective conscious", explains action through reference to collective consensus; reproduction is intentional and integrative, and reaffirms collective life.

Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital" illustrates his

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[8]This is considered an indirect appropriation as Bourdieu appropriates a re-worked version of these concepts from structuralism ('surface' and 'depth' structures).

understanding of cultural processes as "self-sustaining and self-perpetuating" (Jenks, 1993: 12). For example, the transference of cultural capital through inheritance contributes to the anticipation and tolerance of stratification and privilege of structural position; order is reproduced as natural and given. Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" further demonstrates assumptions of cultural reproduction, as it:

> ...provides a link between the structuring of social relationships and the culture of a society (Jenks, 1993: 14).

The habitus reproduces social structure and the symbolic order by providing for actors principles upon which action, perception, thought and appreciation are constituted.

## 4. Culture as lived experience

As I wish to make clear below, the metaphor of reproduction as a way to make sense of social and cultural worlds calls for the study of those worlds at least in part at the level of lived experience. To elaborate, I introduce Thompson's (1990) "structural" definition of culture, then consider again the notion of habitus and introduce Carey's (1989) concept of "symbolic community".

### 4.1. Conceptions of culture

Thompson makes a distinction between "symbolic" and "structural" conceptions of culture, and defines the symbolic conception as:

> ...the pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs (1990: 132).

According to Thompson, the symbolic conception of culture assumes the aim of cultural analysis to be the "elucidation of these patterns of meanings, the interpretive explication of the meanings embodied in symbolic forms" (1990: 132). He argues however that a symbolic conception neglects the study of "problems of power and social conflict" (Thompson, 1990: 134); to add these problems to the cultural studies agenda, he offers a structural conception of culture. Still giving priority to the symbolic, this conception situates the symbolic within social contexts structured by asymmetrical relations of power. The object of inquiry is the "symbolic form", or meaningful phenomena (actions, gestures, rituals, utterances, texts, art), which a) are intentional (forms of expression by and for a subject); b) invoke shared rules, codes or conventions; c) "display an articulated structure" (Thompson, 1990: 141); d) are "referential", or "typically

represent something, refer to something, say something about something" (Thompson, 1990: 143); and e) "are always embedded in specific social-historical contexts and processes within which, and by means of which, they are produced, transmitted and received" (Thompson, 1990: 143).

A structural conception of culture enables priority to be given to the study of lived cultures at the level of experience. Through narrative accounts social agents articulate interpretations of meaningful symbolic forms and practices. The analyst seeks to situate the subject position within contexts and relations of power, politics and inequality. It is at the level of experience that the negotiation of power and struggles for agency are played out. As a signifying practice, culture:

> ...does not stand apart from the socially organized forms of inequality, domination, exploitation, and power that exist in society but is implicated in and inscribed by these practices... (Coombe, 1991: 191),

and thus must not be separated from "the everyday life of political struggle" (Coombe, 1991: 191). Culture is conceived in terms of practice, ritual, sentiment, process and interpretation:

> ...culture must first be seen as a set of practices, a mode of human activity, a process whereby reality is created, maintained, and transformed, however much it may subsequently become reified into a force independent of human action (Carey, 1989: 65).

Conceived as practice, culture is jointly produced as it is carried out within and constituting of social structure. These assumptions negate the validity of assumptions of non-problematic consensus characteristic of the grand narrative of cultural transformation, and open the door for understanding cultural constraint and the negotiation of agency.

### 4.2. Symbolic community and habitus

Cultural forms and practices specific to popular music communities may be understood in the context of "symbolic community" (Carey, 1989) and Bourdieu's "habitus". According to Carey, actors jointly participate in and reproduce complex symbolic communities. Defining and constituting the communities are symbolic forms and practices, as well as social relations and interactions, both immediate (face-to-face) and "quasi" (temporally and spatially distanced). Possibilities for and limits to action are articulated in part through "community ideals" (Carey, 1989: 19). Ideals as such provide not only information about cultural specifics, but offer confirmation and community. According to Carey, the community ideal, embodied in material forms,

> ...creates an artificial through nonetheless real symbolic order that operates to provide not information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things... (1989: 19).

The symbolic order manifests "an ongoing and fragile social process" (Carey, 1989: 19).

An alternative though similar conception of the symbolic cultural realm is offered by Bourdieu's notion of "habitus". This concept emerged through his efforts to overcome the gap between the subjectivism of phenomenological approaches and the objectivism of structuralism (Postone, 1993: 2-3); the former took practice as solely constituting social life, whereas the latter, exemplified by Lévi-Strauss and the structural functionalism of Durkheimian influence, took practice as solely constituted by social structure. For Bourdieu, social life is the "mutually constituting interaction of structures, dispositions, and actions" (Postone, 1993: 4). The habitus is understood as the site where action and social structure intersect.

Structures and situated knowledges of structures produce "enduring orientation(s) to action", themselves constituting social structures (Postone, 1993: 4). Those orientations do not produce action directly. Rather, action is produced through "improvisations", which are "structured by cultural orientations, personal trajectories" (life chances), "and the ability to play the game of social interaction" (Postone, 1993: 4). According to Bourdieu, the habitus is the "capacity for structured improvisation" (Postone, 1993: 4). Improvisations are subjective but at the same time are "structurally grounded" strategies for the accumulation of capital (Postone, 1993: 8). The habitus produces "generative schemes" which are durable and constituted within the social self (Postone, 1993: 4).

## 5. Cultural constraint

Understood as inheriting but modifying certain cultural formations, social actors are both enabled and constrained by their appropriation of symbolic forms and practices. In this section I take up the notion of cultural constraint, and to do so draw on a critical conception of ideology and Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony.

### 5.1. Critical conception of ideology

Culture and ideology are inseparable, though not synonymous. When a neutral conception of ideology, referring to meanings, ideas, values and perspectives, or "world views" is used, ideology can, though I would argue mistakenly, be conflated to

describe culture. A critical conception of ideology, on the other hand, suggests a sharper distinction between culture and ideology; here ideology is reserved to refer to those ideas and beliefs which specifically serve to create and sustain relations of domination. Thus, certain practices may be understood as "cultural" without necessarily being "ideological" (Thompson, 1990).

Critical conceptions of ideology are demarcated on the basis of certain "criteria of negativity", one of which is the criteria that ideas are ideological when they are illusory. Marx's "polemic" conception of ideology, for example, takes ideology as illusory ideas divorced from material conditions and masking "true" conditions of exploitation (Thompson, 1990: 54). His "epiphenomenal" conception understands as ideological those "masking" ideas of the dominant class, and his "latent" conception of ideology refers to ideas which sustain domination through symbolic forms. Mannheim's "restricted" conception of ideology also understands as ideological those ideas divorced from "reality" (Thompson, 1990).

Rejecting the criteria that ideas must be illusory to be ideological, Thompson's critical conception takes as ideological those meaningful symbolic constructs which serve to sustain relations of domination. Ideology is studied at sites of interplay between meaning and power in particular social-historical contexts. Thompson also takes ideological relations to be grounded in forms of domination other than class, including those based on race and gender.

5.1.1. Critical conception of ideology and ethnographic research

We may ask how meanings operate to create and sustain relations of domination. In situated social realities, certain "modes of operation of ideology" and "strategies of symbolic construction" can be identified (Thompson, 1990: 59-60).

First, ideology operates through rational, traditional and charismatic legitimation (Thompson, 1990: 61-62). The construction of symbolic forms induce legitimacy through rationalization, universalization, and narrativization. Respectively, the producer presents a legitimizing chain of reasoning to the audience as a form of justification for the presentation of certain meanings; relations which serve one group are presented as serving the interests of all; and finally, through narrativization, claims to legitimacy are embedded in stories and become part of cherished traditions.

Ideology also operates through processes of dissimulation. Specifically, symbolic forms are constructed to deflect attention away from relations of domination. Strategies of

dissimulation include: displacement, euphemization, and trope. Third, symbolic forms are ideologically encoded through processes of unification, in which collective identities are established symbolically; this occurs through standardization and the symbolization of unity. Fourth, symbolic forms are constructed in such ways as to fragment groups which might otherwise collectively mount challenges to dominant groups; fragmentation is pursued through differentiation and the expurgation of the other. The fifth modus operandi of ideology is reification, wherein that which is transitory is presented as natural and permanent. Strategies of symbolic construction include: naturalization, eternalization, nominalization, and passivization.

If culture is to be understood in terms of ideologically encoded symbolic forms, empirical research must seek to elucidate the specific sites and practices of the construction, reception and appropriation of those forms. While the strategies of construction discussed above may be analyzed at the organizational level of production, the current research is concerned with the reception and appropriation of symbolic forms. Sites and practices of reception and appropriation are also ideologically configured; in-depth interviewing can reveal, for example, common sense interpretive frameworks, within which subordinating practices are naturalized, taken for granted and reified.

5.2. Gramsci's notion of hegemony

A critical conception of ideology, used to understand how asymmetrical relations of power are created and sustained, speaks to notions of cultural constraint. To this end I draw in part on Gramsci's notion of hegemony, to reveal through ethnographic research, "the various means by which hegemony is constructed, maintained, and challenged" (Coombe, 1991: 191). Gramsci addresses "the relation between culture and power under capitalism" (Lears, 1985: 568), and his project informs my work in three ways: a) to clarify "the political functions of cultural symbols"; b) to understand "how ideas reinforce or undermine existing social structures"; and c) "to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the power wielded by dominant groups and the relative cultural autonomy of subordinate groups whom they victimize" (Lears, 1985: 568). In what follows I suggest ways in which Gramsci's work is useful for understanding the reproduction of symbolic forms and practices which serve to sustain asymmetrical relations of domination.

Gramsci's ideas are useful first because he offers a way to conceive domination in the absence of coercion and force. Specifically, consent to existing social orders is achieved through the "creation and perpetuation of legitimating

symbols" (Lears, 1985: 569). Second, Gramsci understands consent as produced through processes of complex negotiation; in this way, a place is afforded to an active subject. This is preferred to understanding consent of the passive subject, portrayed by Althusser, as simply given or learned.

Further, Lears writes that:

> [s]ubordinate groups may participate in maintaining a symbolic universe, even if it serves to legitimate their domination. In other words, they can share a kind of half-conscious complicity in their own victimization (1985: 573).

Through ethnographic research it is possible to identify instances of actors' participation in the production of symbolic forms and practices which contribute to the reproduction of their own subordination. Of particular interest are "unintended consequences":

> Another way to escape from the dead end of social control is to abandon any assumption that there is a straight line linking intentions, actions, and effects. An emphasis on unintended consequences of purposive social action was popularized by Robert Merton half a century ago...Davis showed how antislavery agitators unwittingly promoted new forms of cultural hegemony. This was not their conscious goal...but an unintended by-product of actions aimed at other ends (Lears, 1985: 588).

Narrative accounts, collected through ethnographic research, illustrate common sense interpretive frameworks used by social actors to make sense of their lived experience. Gramsci further suggests that subordination is achieved as dominant ideology provides for actors their "common sense", uncritically accepted by those actors as being in their best interest (Murphy, 1992). Social actors draw on everyday (common sense) codes to interpret their worlds (Bauman, 1976), and may even "enjoy" their subordination as it is masked in common sense (Murphy, 1992).

Turner (1990) understands hegemony to refers to ways in which limits to alternative meanings (and readings) are set, and how pressures for conformity are exerted. Ethnographic accounts are especially useful for revealing legitimate readings and instances of conformity, and the imaginative analyst may be quite successful in attempts to reveal alternative readings which are not legitimated. Hegemony, in short, may be revealed by reading into social contexts what is absent, searching for alternatives denied.

6. Resistance to cultural constraint

The symbolic community or habitus provides for actors ways to

make sense of their lived experience, some of which may sustain certain relations of domination. At the same time, however, actors appropriate symbolic forms and make sense of practices and relations in ways that challenge the existing symbolic order.

Resistance to cultural domination is enabled by the critical appropriation of symbolic forms. This is facilitated by the contingency of meaning and the polysemic nature of texts, or "semiotic excess" (Turner, 1990: 129; Denzin, 1987). Excessive meanings embodied in cultural texts facilitate oppositional readings; semiotic excess may therefore be appropriated to negate the hegemonic forces of ideological unity. Cultural forms and practices are "open ended and inconclusive" rather than "completely self-contained" (Denzin, 1987: 329); meanings are read as being subject to new and alternative interpretations. Textual contradictions resulting from semiotic excess are appropriated for resistance to dominant ideology (Turner, 1990), embodying in the words of Dunn "their own emancipatory moments" (1986: 57).

7. The research problem

In the foregoing discussion of theoretical approaches to the study of popular music in particular and culture generally I have attempted to identify particular assumptions presupposing each perspective, and in doing so, to make explicit some of the underlying assumptions of the present study. Having provided this background it is useful now to outline the questions which frame this research project.

As discussed in the first chapter, most Canadian rock musicians never sign a record deal with a major label. The rise of Independent record labels and increased availability of home-recording equipment offer aspiring musicians opportunities to "prove themselves" as viable investments for the multinational record companies. Without a record deal, musicians must find ways to earn a living, record and produce original music, and promote themselves and their Independent albums to the public in the interest of establishing a reputation as talented musicians with record-contract potential.

In attempts to raise financial capital and develop a following of fans, musicians may choose to perform live music in taverns. The music performed is, however, seldom their own; while venues for original music exist, most tavern managers hire musicians to play popular "cover" songs rather than original music.

A number of research questions are raised when one considers the symbolic, ideological and political structures, and

everyday cultural practices of unsigned rock musicians and their symbolic community, or creative habitus. By understanding the experiences of musicians in terms of a creative habitus, the area of inquiry becomes the structurally grounded actions and interpretive frameworks, and the ways in which musicians are both enabled and constrained by the symbolic codes which structure the habitus.

Tavern musicians participate in the cultural logics of both the cover-tavern performance and the original-music recording industry. Within each, sonic, visual and verbal codes both enable diversity and limit possibilities for action. Of interest are the symbolic relevances of each of these codes for the musicians. Questions asked in the present study are: how do the musicians' practices serve to reproduce the cultural logics of the creative habitus, given the constraining and enabling features? How are those practices structurally grounded in the logics of the tavern performance and original-music recording codes? Further, how do musicians manage contradictions in the symbolic structure? And how do musicians construct their tavern performance, and appropriate sonic, visual and verbal codes in both dominant and oppositional ways? Finally, how are musicians concurrently enabled and constrained by the symbolic structure of the creative habitus?

## 8. Chapter summary

In this chapter I have sought to identify a number of approaches to cultural analysis, and to situate this study within traditions of thought concerning conceptions of culture, ideology, constraint and resistance. From Thompson (1990) and Jenks (1993) I have outlined a theory of cultural reproduction, giving priority to the active construction and re-construction of cultural forms and practices. By appropriating the notions of symbolic community and habitus respectively from Carey and Bourdieu, I have suggested a study of culture at the level of lived experience. I have further discussed notions of constraint, with particular attention to a critical conception of ideology and Gramsci's notion of hegemony, and of resistance, thought to be negotiated through the oppositional appropriation of symbolic forms and practices. The chapter was concluded by raising a number of questions which inform the present study. In the following chapter I discuss the methodological strategy employed in this research as well as specific research techniques.

## Chapter 3: Methodological Strategy and Techniques[9]

### 1. The research process

The three-part research agenda of this study required a combination of methodological strategies. The first objective was to understand the structural location of the tavern musician, and to do so I conducted interviews with local music industry personnel and surveyed the literature on the Canadian music industry. My second objective was to identify and understand various symbolic forms and practices of tavern music culture. To this end, I observed tavern performances and held in-depth interviews with musicians. Finally, I sought to situate musicians' interpretive accounts within the structure of the tavern industry, to a) construct a plausible account of ways in which those interpretations might contribute to the reproduction of the tavern culture; and b) to suggest ways those accounts might both enable and constrain the tavern musician. This re-interpretation was facilitated by a number of theoretical works.

To organise the research, I selectively appropriated a methodological strategy suggested by Thompson's (1990) "depth hermeneutics". This framework enabled the research areas to be conceived in terms of three domains of inquiry: (1) the internal structure of the sonic and visual dimensions of rock music culture; (2) narrative accounts of lived experience as told by tavern musicians; and (3) the socio-cultural structure of the local tavern industry. In the following section I outline briefly the methodological strategy of depth hermeneutics, identifying in particular assumptions which presuppose this study.

### 2. Methodological framework of depth hermeneutics

The methodological strategy of depth hermeneutics is concerned with the study of symbolic forms, defined by Thompson (1990) as "meaningful actions, objects and expressions of various kinds..." (136). Symbolic forms are understood as: a) meaningful symbolic constructs requiring interpretation; b) "pre-interpreted"; c) situated within social and historical contexts; and d) internally structured (Thompson, 1990: 272-3).

Depth hermeneutic cultural analysis involves the "hermeneutics of everyday life" (Thompson, 1990; Coombe, 1991; Murphy, 1992: 35); ethnographic methods seek to grasp the actors' interpretations of symbolic forms. Formal or discursive

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[9]Because all of the musicians interviewed were male, masculine pronouns are used throughout the following chapters.

analyses then attempt to penetrate the "articulated structure" of symbolic forms, to reveal their complex symbolic construction (Thompson, 1990: 284-288). Third, social-historical conditions of the production, circulation, and reception of symbolic forms are identified, and finally, based on this analysis, a plausible re-interpretation of the life-situation of the research participants is offered (Thompson, 1990: 289-290).

In the following section I discuss each of these domains of inquiry as they organize the study. With respect to the interpretation of doxa, I discuss the procedures of interviewing. I then discuss observations and secondary documents as sources of information on the socio-cultural contexts in which musicians act, and conclude the section with an introduction to the methods of photograph content analysis as a technique for the study of the internal structure of symbolic forms relevant to the symbolic code of rock.

## 3. Domains of inquiry

### 3.1. Interpretation of doxa: In-depth interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the manager of the tavern in which the study took place, one booking agent, and five musicians hired to perform at the tavern[10]. The tavern manager and booking agent were interviewed to collect data on the industry configuration and operation[11]. Tavern

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[10]Ideas for this research and the ensuing analysis were influenced by my work in this field over the last three years, during which time I conducted formal and informal interviews with musicians. Similarities among tavern musicians and the practices and cultures of various taverns are apparent; just as one tavern does not deviate far in practice and culture from other Western Canadian taverns, neither do the tavern musicians deviate, in terms at least of stage presentation and interpretive frameworks. Thus, while I present this research as a case study, and therefore intend only to speak in the concrete sense to the situation of the musicians interviewed, it is not unrealistic to suggest that the findings of this project may be similar to findings of studies of other Western Canadian "A-circuit" rock taverns and musicians.

[11]Interview transcripts from interviews with the tavern manager and booking agent were not subject to in-depth analysis and re-interpretation. Rather, the information gained through these accounts are used to inform my understanding of the industry in general and the situation of the musicians in particular.

musicians were interviewed to collect narrative accounts of their experiences in the industry. In the interest of identifying the potential ideological encoding of common sense interpretations, as well as strategies for the pursuit of artistic creativity through oppositional readings of symbolic forms, it was necessary to document the experiences, perspectives, and accounts of the musicians, as told in their own words.

### 3.1.1. Selection of research participants

The selection of research participants was determined in part by the structure of tavern circuit. Managers hire bands to perform in their tavern either through a booking agent or through direct negotiations with the band leader[12]. When hiring through an agent, the manager indicates the salary he or she is willing to offer a band, and the booking agent fills the contract by finding a band willing to work for that wage.

Taverns are given an informal rating as either an "A", "B" or "C" room, based on their relatively stable entertainment budget. A tavern offering the highest salary is an "A" tavern, a room offering the lowest salary is a "C" room, and that offering a salary less than the A room and greater than the C room is known as a "B" tavern; respectively, these rooms collectively constitute the "A", "C" and "B" circuits. Bands also earn informal ratings as either "A", "B", or "C" bands, depending on the salary range they can demand or are willing to accept.

Because I was interested in studying opportunities for original-music expression, I wanted to talk to musicians who were pursuing original-music ventures, but who were still playing in the taverns. In an earlier study I learned that the "best" tavern bands played the "A" circuit, and therefore I chose one of two "A" taverns in Edmonton for my research (see Appendix 1).

During the course of my field research, musicians who played at this tavern were asked to participate in the study. A different band plays at the tavern every week[13], with some

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[12]"Leaders" are typically the lead singer in the band. All musicians interviewed were lead singers, and considered themselves to be the leaders of their bands.

[13]There was the possibility for repetition in participants, as they may be re-booked in the tavern every three or fourth months. However, this did not pose a problem; only one band played twice during my field work, and I was out of town at the time.

weeks having as many as four bands. Musicians were contacted at the tavern hotel by telephone, told about my project and asked for an interview. None refused, though two interviews did not materialize due to incommensurable schedules. Interviews with musicians were conducted either in their hotel room or the hotel cafe. The tavern manager and booking agent were interviewed in their offices.

### 3.1.2. The interview schedule

Because my research interests were relatively well-defined, semi-structured interviews enabled specific issues to be addressed, but at the same time allowed for flexibility in both questions and responses. Participants were asked to describe certain experiences and opinions in their own words. Questions underwent revision as the research progressed, and interviews became increasingly unstructured as my understanding of the field matured. Initial topics concerned the type of songs played, the creative experience, and the stage presentation, including dress and stage talk (see interview schedule, Appendix 2).

Interviews with the tavern manager and booking agent were conducted for the primary purpose of understanding the structural configuration of the tavern music industry. Participants were asked to reflect on a number of issues, including band selection and hiring processes, and regulations and conventions governing relationships with the band members. All interviews, including those held with musicians were tape recorded (with permission from participants) and transcribed verbatim.

### 3.1.3. Analysis of interview transcripts

Two objectives informed the analysis of interview transcripts. The first was to describe the tavern scene from the perspective of the musicians. My second objective was to re-interpret the stories told by the musicians within the socio-cultural contexts of the music industry. To offer a critical re-interpretation I drew on theoretical concepts central to the cultural studies literature; specifically, my analysis was sensitized by concepts of habitus, symbolic forms, strategies of symbolic valuation, ideology, constraint and resistance.

### 3.1.4. Checks in interviewing

Interview responses are potentially subject to fabrication, exaggeration, deception and distortion, and to discrepancies between interview talk and observed practices. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest that repetitive, in-depth interviewing provides the rapport and familiarity with interviewees that facilitate the identification of distortions and

discrepancies. However, given that tavern musicians were only in the city for up to five days, repeated interviews were not possible. Therefore, alternative checks were employed: comparisons were made between the interview responses and my observations of performances; field notes were compared to interview data; and comparisons were made among data collected from each of the participants. Though none were found, radically opposing perceptions would have been considered as potential fabrications, and investigated further[14].

To assess the credibility of the interviews (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984: 140), data was evaluated as either solicited or unsolicited, prompted or probed. Unsolicited data was not considered problematic, but was understood within the context of the interview. In other words, narrative accounts were considered to be part of an ongoing dialogue rather than simply as isolated topical stories. Solicited or probed data was identified, and to discover whether similar data would be offered spontaneously, I did not probe for it in future interviews. Information solicited in one interview but offered "spontaneously" in another was taken to increase the credibility of the original, solicited account. Finally, consistency in responses across interview participants contributed to my confidence in the credibility of the accounts.

The credibility of the informants was also evaluated to assess the quality of each interview. For instance, I considered whether participants were potentially under the influence of drugs or alcohol, whether musicians interviewed were leaders of their band or "secondary" members, and responses were considered in the context of any biographical information provided by informants.

A third consideration in evaluating the credibility of the interviews involved reflection on my role as researcher and my effect on the interview process. To make this assessment, the transcripts were analyzed in terms of responses and opinions I expressed which may have influenced the responses.

Finally, I considered whether my interpretations of the data were "direct" or "indirect"; in other words, I assessed the amount of inference I had to make to come to the conclusions that I did. The most effective way of doing this I found was to identify and ascertain the credibility of alternative interpretations. Where alternatives seemed plausible, I developed questions for future interviews that might lend

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[14]For example, issues over which there were discrepancies would be included as topics for discussion in upcoming interviews with other musicians.

support for, or negate, my original interpretation.

### 3.2. Socio-cultural contexts: Observations & secondary documents

Tavern observations were conducted for the primary purpose of tape recording the musicians' stage talk. Stage talk refers to the verbal presentation of the musicians, addressed to the audience over the microphone before and after the performance, between sets, and between and during songs. Through their stage talk, musicians often encourage the audience to consume alcohol and to "party". It was thought that the stage talk would lend insight into the role of the performer within the structure of the local music industry; for example, if the band was hired to sell liquor, the fact that they encourage the audience to buy drinks would be relevant for the study. Stage talk was recorded with an audio recorder, transcribed, and subject to analysis. Permission was granted by the tavern manager to tape record during my visits to the tavern.

Performances were observed on an irregular basis; over the course of the project roughly 20 visits were made. The stage performance changes over the course of the night, and in the interest of recording stage talk representative of all "stages" of the performance, I visited the tavern at random times - either during the first, second or third set of the performance.

Secondary documents provided contextual information. A sample contract between musicians and the tavern manager was obtained, and magazines (fan, technical and those produced for the Edmonton public) were read to learn about the commercial and tavern rock music industries. Scholarly articles and books were also consulted.

#### 3.2.1. Field notes

Immediately following the observations and interviews detailed field notes were made. The researcher is a "human tool" in the research process, and thus the field notes served not only as a source of description, but also as a site of reflection.

### 3.3. Internal structure of symbolic forms

As mentioned, a study of culture informed by a depth hermeneutic tripartite approach also seeks to understand the internal structure of symbolic forms. This study is premised on the assumption that tavern musicians participate in a shared symbolic structure. Returning to Bourdieu's notion of habitus, it is suggested that the musicians' strategies for action are structurally grounded in shared symbolic codes of rock in general, and in the tavern rock performance in

particular. An analysis of the internal structure of symbolic forms can provide support for the existence of this symbolic structure. Specifically, the visual appearance of tavern musicians was analyzed and compared to that of popular recording musicians. My intention was to illustrate a shared symbolic structure in which musicians participate.

To determine the degree of similarity between the visual self-presentation of tavern and popular recording musicians I conducted a descriptive content analysis of promotional pictures of each. Photographs of popular recording musicians were found in heavy metal fan magazines, and promotional pictures of tavern musicians were collected from the tavern manager and from some of the musicians interviewed. It is useful here to consider the use of photography in sociological research.

### 3.3.1. Photographs as objects of inquiry

Photographs have traditionally been employed in sociological research for the ancillary purpose of description. Pictures have been used to illustrate and validate the written word, but are seldom the object of analysis (Ball & Smith, 1992: 9-12). Words are preferred in sociology, and the main mode of visual presentation has been the table, chart, and graph. A number of studies however have used the photograph as a source of data, including as exemplars: Bateson and Mead's (1942) "Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis"; Goffman's (1979) "Gender Advertisements"; and Robertson (1976) used magazine photographs to study the historical changes in men's beards (all cited in Ball & Smith, 1992: 23)[15].

### 3.3.2. Content analysis and semiotics

I initially considered my analysis of photographs to be a distinctively "semiotic" analysis; however, unlike semiotic analysis, it became clear that content analysis cannot penetrate the meanings of symbolic forms. Even so, a

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[15]A number of issues are raised when using photographs as primary data (Ball and Smith, 1992). First, photos are part of the society they describe. Promotional photographs of musicians exist prior to analysis and serve a function in the everyday life of the community. A second issue concerns authenticity; photographs used in this research were considered in light of possible fabrications, possibly intended to enhance the visual impact of the photo. A final issue concerns the polysemic nature of photographs; because the analysis of photographs is an interpretive process, it is possible that the content I found of specific interest may not be considered equally significant by the musicians.

systematic, descriptive content analysis was justified in light of the objectives of this research. This analysis was conducted to identify the degree of similarity between the visual appearance of tavern musicians and that of commercial recording musicians, and to this end, meanings held by musicians were considered secondary to the analysis. Though content analysis cannot determine whether tavern musicians actually simulate the appearance of popular recording artists (ie. it is impossible to determine the direction of influence, if any, through content analysis), the results can suggest the degree to which similarities exist, and whether visual symbolic forms are shared by musicians at both levels of industry.

### 3.3.3. Selection of photographs

A number of rock music magazines appear on the market. Those marketed to musicians focus on technical aspects of music, including tips on playing, advertisements for equipment and detachable musical scores. Photos of musicians in these magazines are rare, and for that reason they were not considered for analysis. Rather, only "fan" magazines, primarily composed of pictures of popular recording rock musicians, were considered. A number of fan magazines were reviewed, and one was chosen for having the greatest number of color, full-length photographs of musicians. Pictures of 75 individual musicians were analyzed.

Promotional photographs of tavern musicians were obtained from the manager of the tavern and some musicians[16]. Pictures excluded from analysis include candid shots and those showing only faces. The visual appearances of 35 individual tavern musicians were analyzed[17].

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[16]These include photographs of musicians who were not interviewed.

[17]Photographs of tavern musicians were in short supply. They are expensive to produce and with limited budgets, musicians were hesitant to part with them. The tavern manager had a large number of photos, but often had only one copy of each and again, was resistant to part with them. However, it was not necessary that I analyze an equal number of commercial and local pictures. Rather, it was important that I had a sample large enough to enable patterns to emerge; thirty-five was adequate for this purpose.

## 4. Research with human participants

### 4.1. "Authorial authority": The place of the author in the ethnographic text

The authority given to narrative accounts collected through ethnographic research varies, and depends in part on the intentions of the researcher. Authors intending to describe the lived experience of a group of people might give priority to interview accounts, as Susan Krieger did in The Mirror Dance (1983). Krieger organized verbatim accounts in such a way as to form a coherent and meaningful story, but otherwise let the participants "speak for themselves". In other texts, voices of participants are present only marginally, cited in descriptive quotes meant to convey powerful imagery and lend validity to the sense the researcher has made of the accounts (Denzin, 1992: 129).

There is however doubt among ethnographers "that any discourse has a privileged place" (Richardson, 1992: 103-104). The following questions, posed by Laurel Richardson, have informed the production of this text. She asks:

> Whose authority counts when? How can/should authorship be claimed? Where do validity/credibility/reliability fit? How does one's writing reflect one's social privileges? What part of my biography, my process, is relevant to the text-writing? How do I write myself into the text without being self-absorbed or unduly narcissistic? How can I write so that others' "voices" are not only heard but listened to? For whom should we write? What consequences does our work have for the people we study, and what are my ethical responsibilities for these consequences? (1992: 108).

While reflection on these questions and others[18] inform the

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[18]I also found questions raised by Denzin (1992b) to problematize my efforts at ethnography: "Consider some troubling alternatives. The ethnographer's text creates the subject; subjects exist only in so far as they are brought into our written texts. Language and speech are not direct mirrors to thought, for language only distorts what it represents. Furthermore, subjects may not know what they think, change their minds, or deliberately mislead an investigator. In addition, the statements a subject offers may be influenced by other forms of textuality and interaction, including cultural standards already established, folklore, characters in novels, advertisements, and myth, as well as other filmic, literary, and scientific representations of their experiences" (124-125).

current project, the pre-requisite of coming fully to terms with each would be immobilizing.

One approach to offering reasonable positions on these questions, which allows at least for work to proceed, is to make explicit the assumptions presupposing the work in question. The first I want to make explicit concerns claims to representation. In collecting stories of lived experience through narrative or other discourse,

> ...we can never get back to the flesh-and-blood individuals who live in the real world; we can only encounter their representations in our ethnographic texts (Denzin, 1992b: 125).

What I present in this thesis is in effect "twice removed" from lived experience. The telling of stories by subjects constitutes the first displacement; the telling of the story invokes certain organizational strategies, suggested both by myself through interview questions, prompts and probes, and by the subjects' own organizational schemes[19]. Second, through my analysis the accounts of the musicians are re-interpreted both in the context of other interview material and in context of my understanding of the social, cultural and political contexts of the musicians.

The topic of representation leads to a second presupposition of this work. In the words of Denzin,

> [p]ostmodernism undermines the realist agenda, contending that things do not exist independent of their representations in social texts. Accordingly, if we want to change how things are, we must change how they are seen (1992b: 126).

What is key in this passage is the idea of changing social conditions through representation. The work presented here goes beyond "objective" description of the life of a tavern musician. Through critical strategies it seeks to offer a re-interpretation of relations of subordination and domination in which musicians are implicated. Thus, the re-interpretation offered, though only one plausible reading, hopes to offer both academic and musical communities an alternative way of making sense of the musicians' place in the tavern industry.

## 4.2. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations followed the standards set by the University of Alberta Ethics Committee. Participants were

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[19]One example of such an organizational strategy is that of the media interview. Giving interviews is familiar practice to the musicians in this study, and in some cases I detected a certain 'media gloss' to organize their stories; it was at times as if I was given a standard media interview.

interviewed only after giving written, informed consent (consent forms, Appendix 3). Because the purpose of the research was theoretically complex and not completely defined at the time of all interviews, participants were given a relatively simple description of the study. Specifically, they were told that their participation would contribute to my understanding of the local music scene. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured. The full names of the participants were recorded only on the consent forms, which were in no way associated with the data collected. Pseudonyms in the final text replace the real names of people and places.

5. Chapter summary

Three domains of inquiry structure this study: interpretation of doxa, socio-cultural contexts, and internal structure of symbolic forms. Each domain was investigated through specific methodological techniques, including, respectively: in-depth, semi-structured interviews, tavern observations and secondary documents, and content analysis. In the chapters that follow this organizing strategy becomes less apparent. All data was collected, studied, interpreted and re-interpreted concurrently in a process ongoing for eight months. To present "findings" from each domain of inquiry separately would not only distort the actual process of this research, but would fail to do justice to the complex, fluid nature of social and cultural life.

As an alternative strategy I organize the following text around key themes which emerged from both the data collection and the theoretical framework. Data collected through interviews is presented as it speaks to each theme, and is re-interpreted within broader contexts of the tavern industry and the theoretical concepts.

## Chapter Four: The Structural Position of Tavern Musicians

### 1. The musicians

The musicians interviewed were selected on the basis of their career position: they were pursuing original-music ventures, but at the same time performed cover music for tavern audiences. The purpose of the study was to examine the musicians' participation in the symbolic code of rock music culture, and to demarcate ways in which that code both enables and constrains their original-music production. It would have been ineffective to interview musicians who perform on "B" and "C" circuits, as they are typically lower-calibre musicians with less interest in or ability for original-music ventures. At the other end of the tavern-circuit hierarchy are musicians who are well known for their original music; although such musicians occasionally perform in the tavern, they play strictly original music, have already established themselves as a viable investment for the record labels, and conceivably follow a different set of cultural logics. Thus, the musicians interviewed were selected for their particular location in the tavern circuit hierarchy, and it is through their narratives that I am able to suggest some specific strategies through which musicians interpret the sonic, visual and verbal dimensions of the symbolic code of the tavern performance in particular and the recording industry generally.

Before discussing the interview data, it is useful to get a feel for who the participants are, their current employment situation and their career trajectories.

Jake, originally from Edmonton, is the lead vocalist for a Vancouver-based rock[20] band. He performed in the tavern from Wednesday to Sunday, after which he toured to Lethbridge, Calgary, and Kelowna. I interviewed Jake for three hours before his Sunday performance, and talked with him between sets and for two hours after his show. His current band formed from the merger of two previous bands, one of which he was a member for about ten years. While his current band plays both original and cover material, his former band played exclusively covers; he feels he "reached the top" with his cover band, playing the biggest clubs and earning the most money one can earn as a cover band, and he now wants to make it as an original band. To this end, he released an independent album four months prior to our interview. The album took one and a half years to record, and during this

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[20]The musicians had considerable difficulty classifying their music. The labels used here were offered during the interviews, but are to be taken as tentative rather than definitive classifications.

time his band played weekends in Vancouver area lounges. Jake did not have external financing for this production.

Jake refers to himself as "self-managed"; at present he does not have a contract with a band manager, nor does he have a record- or distribution-deal. He consigns his album to a number of major record stores in Western Canada, and considers himself responsible for the promotion of the band. This involves arranging interviews with local media and selling his album during tavern performances. Though he previously had a contract with a major Vancouver booking agent, he now only uses the Vancouver agent on occasion. Jake does not have a personal band manager; he has had one in the past but feels for now that he is doing a better job without one. He does anticipate hiring a manager again in the future, and feels his band is "established enough" to do so; he hopes that this will give him more time to concentrate on his original-music endeavours.

Jake's goals are to sign a record and distribution deal, and to tour with larger Canadian acts as an original musician. By working in Canadian rock taverns and submitting demo tapes to major record labels, Jake hopes to realize these dreams. His more immediate goals include touring Western Canada and producing a music video.

Less is known about Todd, as our interview was considerably shorter. We met just prior to his performance, and talked for only 45 minutes. The lead vocalist of a Calgary-based hard rock band, Todd plays both cover songs and originals, tours Western Canada, and played in the tavern for one night. He has financed and produced one independent album, and at the time of the interview was not signed with a record label or distribution company. To be signed is, however, his goal, as is securing a distribution deal. He books some of his gigs through an agent, but is not signed and thus "books out" on his own as well. At the time of the interview he was in negotiations with a Vancouver-based band management company. Like Jake, Todd considers himself to be self-sufficient, responsible for band promotion and setting up tour dates.

I spent roughly eight hours with Rob, a lead vocalist with a Winnipeg-based band. Rob not only leads the band, but defines it as "his" band; during a three month period prior to our interview, he fired and replaced each member of his band four times. Rob's tavern performance includes both cover and original material. He also describes himself as "self-managed", and books his own gigs; though Rob is not contracted with a booking agent, he does say that agents are "impossible to avoid". His first album, three years in the making, was released last year. Unlike Jake, Todd and Les, Rob had external funding for his album. He was awarded a $20,000 sound

grant[21] to be used for recording on the basis that he match the funds. He did, and his album was recorded, produced and promoted through a Toronto-based, independent record company. Rob consigns his album to record stores, and sells it during his tavern performances.

Rob also has a music video which appears on MuchMusic. At present, he is not signed with a record label, does not have a distribution deal, nor does he have a band manager. At the time of the interview he was considering leaving the tavern circuit, intending to concentrate on his original music. He also works as a substitute school teacher in Winnipeg[22].

Les works full-time for an Edmonton-based booking agency, and considers himself to be an established, "self-sufficient" local tavern musician[23]. He performs in the tavern on numerous occasions throughout the year, and given his occupation, does not use an agent, nor does he have a band manager. The lead vocalist of an "alternative" band, he plays primarily cover songs in the taverns; while he writes original music, he considers the tavern band to be an entity distinct from the original-music venture. He has not released an album, but hopes to produce one in the future[24]. I spoke with Les for two hours one evening, and we have remained in casual contact since the interview.

Peter is the lead vocalist for a Vancouver-based "alternative" band. Now 25, he has been playing in bands and writing original music since he was 17. He has been with his current band for two and a half years. Peter gave one tavern performance, in which he played primarily cover songs. Our interview was conducted prior to his performance, and was 90 minutes in length. Of the musicians interviewed, he was the only one to have signed a record deal with a major Canadian label. His first album was released two months prior to our

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[21]CIDO - Cultural Industries Development Office, Government of Canada and Government of Manitoba.

[22]At the time of this writing, Rob was teaching full time, and had plans to return to the tavern circuit at the end of the term. The original venture had not materialized.

[23]Les did however spend a considerable amount of time on the road, touring with a cover/original band prior to securing employment in the city.

[24]His first band achieved international success with an album he helped record. Though he quit that band shortly before it became successful, he currently receives royalties from the album.

interview. His band shares personal management with major US recording artists Megadeath, and they have opened for such acts as KISS and Pearl Jam. He has a booking agent, a Canadian distribution deal, and a video on MuchMusic. At the time of our interview he had just returned from a Canadian tour, and was in negotiations with an American record label for his next album. Although Peter had considerable external support for his original music, he perceives his success to be largely the result of his own efforts; prior to the record deal, he financed the production of demo-tapes, promoted his band, and booked his own gigs.

While there are differences, I want to draw attention to similarities among the musicians. First, all were leaders of their band. As such, they were responsible for managing the band, which includes arranging tours and booking the gigs, and were responsible for pursuing record, distribution and management deals. All considered themselves to be "self-sufficient", in that they did not share these responsibilities with industry professionals[25].

All musicians performed both cover and original material in the tavern, and all but Les were touring[26]. At the same time, all were aspiring to "make it" as original musicians. All but Les had produced an album; Jake and Todd financed albums themselves, Rob raised funds to match his grant, and Peter had financial support from a major label. At the time of the interviews, none had a record deal (Peter's had expired), and only Peter had a distribution deal.

Thus, all musicians had an interest in composing and recording original music, were responsible promotion and distribution, and concurrently made their living playing cover songs in taverns. The general focus of this study was to understand the experiences of the musician as both "cover" and "original". In this chapter, I explore the structure of the tavern gig, musicians' access to resources, thought necessary to achieve a record deal, and ways in which musicians manage the "audience-oriented" demands of the tavern gig and the "creative" demands of the original-music venture.

In Chapter 5 I re-define the structural location of the tavern

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[25]Peter is the exception; his management company was responsible for these tasks. However, prior to being signed his band was in circumstances similar to the other musicians interviewed.

[26]As mentioned, Les does not currently tour, but he has spent considerable time on the road in the past and was thus able to reflect on that experience.

musician with concepts borrowed from John B. Thompson (1990); given that the musicians have restricted access to resources, they would, according to Thompson, be considered as occupying a "subordinate" position. Deena Weinstein (1991), also understanding musicians as subordinate, suggests that by accommodating the demands of the musical performance, the musician is never what matters most: an artist. Within this framework, I look at how symbolic conventions of the tavern performance and the broader music industry are constraining to the musician, but I also reexamine the assumptions of Thompson and Weinstein to suggest ways in which musicians appropriate and interpret symbolic codes in the pursuit of artistic creativity. I show how, while musicians may be structurally subordinate and denied opportunities to be "artists", they pursue strategies of "symbolic valuation" which are characteristic of intermediate and dominant groups and enable the pursuit of artistic creativity.

## 2. The tavern gig

Musicians identify a number of venues for the performance of rock music by drawing distinctions between what we may term "cover" and "original" clubs[27]:

> ...there's sort of two tracks it seems. One is more commercial rooms that make, that generate more dollars. And the other one is, uh, less or non-commercial rooms or alternative rooms or whatever that, that don't make any money...like you don't make any money when you play them (original clubs) because they pay such low wages (Rob).

Les also draws a distinction between cover and original clubs. He discussed two clubs in Edmonton, each of which "attract their own clientele"; one attracts those who want to hear original music, and the other attracts those who want to hear cover songs[28].

Consistent with the literature (ie. Groce, 1989), the musicians in this study interpret cover bars to pay higher wages than clubs which hire exclusively original acts.

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[27]While Jake, Les and Rob refer to the "cover scene", only Les called the bar in which cover songs are played, a "cover bar". The musicians did not call the venue for original music an "original club", although Jake, Les and Rob used the term "original scene".

[28]Though only two musicians drew explicit distinctions between cover and original clubs, support for the distinction was found in a local music magazine; weekly listings of bands playing at each club in the city show consistency in hiring either cover or original acts.

According to Les:

> We don't do any originals live. The original band is a very separate entity from this, this is money-whoring is what this is. Get the cash and dash. (And the cash is for playing covers?) Yeah, yeah. At the B---- you can make fifty dollars for playing three nights, where here I can make six hundred bucks for playing three nights.

Jake also said that wages are higher for cover acts than they are for original-music gigs. Neither Rob nor Paul offered evidence to contradict this; the topic of wages was not addressed in our interviews. Todd did, however, say that he wants to play primarily original music, as he believes this is the way to make money. Perhaps Todd has in the past been paid a higher wage for playing original gigs than for cover gigs; on the other hand, he may not have been referring to making more money with originals within the context of the bar circuit, but rather within the context of the popular recording artists, who, it would seem, do in fact earn more money than do those playing the tavern scene. Regardless, there is ample support for the notion that musicians earn less money playing original gigs than they do playing cover gigs; original gigs are typically one or two night gigs, whereas bands are typically hired for one week in the cover taverns, and thus it can be inferred that musicians can earn more money playing for five or six nights than by playing for one or two.

Musicians contract their services to the cover tavern in order to earn a living. Although all had an interest in composing and performing original music,

> ...you know the whole point is to make money. Like you've got to be able to make money. You can't really hold, you can only hold a band together on a shared sense of adventures against the world, damn the torpedoes, you know for so long before it, before it's not, reality sort of sets in (Rob).

The "reality" of which Rob speaks refers, at least in part, to the financial capital necessary to accommodate the basic cost of living. And, for a member of Jake's band, it means supporting a family in Vancouver while on the road performing. The "reality" also refers to gig-related expenditures, such as those for musical equipment and rental vehicles and, in the words of Jake, the need to "put a little away for a rainy day, flat tire, insurance...gas and guitar strings". Les also reflected on his time spent on the road, playing the tavern circuit, and in retrospect concludes that the net profit, after paying gig-related expenses, was "not worth it":

> P.A.'s cost about twelve hundred dollars a week, to rent, that's before your sound man, before your light man, before your transportation, you know so the up keep, if you're looking at twenty five hundred bucks a week with your agency fees and your

> up keep, you know. Five hundred dollars, a hundred bucks each or a hundred and twenty five bucks each depending on the size of the band, it's not worth it (Les).

Rob was also cynical about the wages:

> I mean being a human juke box is nothing. It's a stupid life. For the princely sum of like the highest paid band guys get a maximum of like let's say with an act coming through that's popular, that has recorded stuff, they may pay this guy five hundred bucks a week. **When** they're working. Typically, band people will make two to three hundred dollars a week. Big fucking deal. That's just not good enough.

Though not articulated by all the musicians, it may be inferred that the tavern gig is also considered a source of funding for original-music ventures. Rob used the wages earned from both substitute teaching and the tavern gigs to match his recording grant, and Jake's band performed gigs in a Vancouver club to finance their independent album. While the musicians feel that their earnings are still relatively low playing on the tavern circuit, it is not unreasonable to suggest that money earned playing the tavern circuit contributes to the financing of original-music pursuits, particularly if the musician's main source of income is the tavern gig.

Original-music composition and recording, self-promotion and distribution require significant economic capital, and time off the road to compose and record involves a period of unemployment:

> ...you've got to save enough money to take the time off, save enough money to pay for the recording time, which is incredible I mean if you want to record at the same level that they're (popular recording artists) recording at you're paying a thousand bucks a day for the studio (Jake).

Further, Rob spoke repeatedly of having to finance, in part, his original album, and Peter's band financed a number of original recordings (ie. demo tapes) prior to signing with a major record label[29].

To support themselves and their original-music interests, musicians are motivated to secure tavern gigs, and, once hired, to perform in a manner that will increase the

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[29]Neither Les nor Todd offered evidence to contradict this point. That Les did not discuss the expenses of recording original music may be explained by the fact that he was not, at the time of the interview, actively pursuing original-music recordings; and the topic was not discussed with Todd.

likelihood of being hired again. Musicians are hired, in part, on the basis of their reputation for their ability to promote liquor sales in the tavern. When asked whether bands earn reputations for having high liquor sales, Rob replied "Absolutely. Absolutely". While Rob was the only musician to talk explicitly about it, interviews with both the tavern manager and the booking agent confirmed that bands earn reputations[30].

2.1. Profit-motivation and tavern gig conventions

The musicians understand that the primary concern of the tavern manager is to turn a profit from liquor sales:

> ...you know bar managers are a whole other breed. I mean they may or may not be aware of music. They are aware of the Jewish piano at the end of the night. (Jewish piano?). Being the cash register. And that's all that they care about. That's the bottom line. That's the bottom fucking line. It's obviously money driven (Rob).
>
> (Why do you think you're hired by the bar?) Well obviously because we sell beer. That's what it's all about. This is not about music. In bars it's <u>not</u> about music. That's a by-product. What it is only specifically about is selling beer. It's got nothing to do with art... they wouldn't give a fucking shit if you put a basket of tomatoes on stage, if they were selling a bunch of beer (Rob).
>
> (Why is it important to you that the audience has a good time?) ...that's why I get paid. I get paid to make that crowd go. Because the more they go, they come back the next night. We sell more beer, we sell more alcohol, liquor sales are higher, they (tavern management) bring us back. That's the reason from the bar's point of view (Jake).
>
> ...music, it's money, it all relates to that. If you don't generate cash for who you're working for,

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[30]It is not necessary that the musicians be aware of or articulate a knowledge of reputations; even if musicians are typically unaware of the reputation they might earn, there is evidence that musicians gear their show toward the expectations of the tavern manager. That is, they construct a performance geared toward the promotion of liquor consumption. What is crucial to note is that there is a certain logic to the tavern performance, a logic which is not solely of the musicians' making; they do not have complete autonomy in the construction of their tavern show.

> then you're not working for them any more and you're back in the basement again (Rob).

Both Jake and Les understand liquor sales to increase when the band, to use their words, "draws well"; the more patrons the band can attract to the club, the higher the sales will be[31]. The logic shared by musicians is this: patrons come to the bar to be entertained. The band is hired by the bar to entertain, based on the premise that if entertained, patrons will dance, party, and as a logical consequence, liquor sales will increase[32].

By adhering to certain performance conventions, musicians are thought to increase liquor sales, thereby appeasing the tavern manager and increasing their employment chances. Performance conventions require the musicians to be "audience-oriented"; they gear their performance to the demands of the audience, understanding their role as "entertainer". The objectives are to keep the patrons in the club, and to keep them drinking. According to Les,

> [w]ith the covers you're trying to appeal to a number of different age groups at the same time, while keeping everybody in the club.

And according to Peter, when giving a live performance, "[y]ou've got to give a good show". To this end, musicians play popular cover songs, and organize their show based on "what works" in the club:

> ...you got to see what songs are working, if you play one song and it usually works and it doesn't do a damn thing, then you know to stay away from that area (Les).

> ...people dance, they have fun, clap at the tunes, just basic stuff...or if they're just standing there like dopes going you know, giving you the finger then you know they don't like it (Les).

> You get the right order going, and you're clickin',

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[31]Neither Todd nor Peter directly discussed the profit-motivated agenda of the tavern manager. Two explanations for this may be suggested. First, Todd's tavern performance was less central to our discussion than was his original-music venture; had we talked more about the performance this point may have been made. Second, it may be the case that some musicians are not aware of the manager having such an agenda, or this may be taken-for-granted and thus not have come to mind (neither Todd nor Peter were asked to reflect on the manager's "agenda").

[32]Interviews with the tavern manager and a booking agent revealed similar interpretations.

> everything's clickin' down the line, by the end of the night, everybody's just you know, in a good mood (Jake).
>
> Last night, we were doing our normal show, and we had to completely change it around half way through the night because it wasn't working at all. Like the second set was like deadsville. The people were like, deadsville. Couldn't get nothing going with the crowd. And the third set we just danced them to death, just played a whole bunch of canned stuff, good current stuff, and then by the end it was great. It was rocking. Everyone was going "wholly smokes, the crowd really turned around" (Jake).

What "works" is determined by a) the type of club; b) audience demographics; and c) the type of music patrons dance to. Audience-oriented strategies also involve decisions of whether to play cover or original music, and choice of cover songs to play.

In the interest of appeasing the tavern manager, musicians choose to play primarily cover songs and attribute this decision to the demands of the audience. If they play originals,

> ...all we're going to do is kill the crowd because nobody knows the stuff. Nobody comes to clubs like this to hear original songs...you lose a lot of your audience when you're playing original stuff because a lot of people aren't necessarily in the same head space as you (Les).
>
> ...We tried to do original stuff...The bars didn't want you. You play two original songs and they want nothing to do with you...Cause they got ten other bands that will keep the dance floor packed. Keep the people drinking drinking drinking. That's all they give a shit about is liquor sales. It all comes down to liquor sales in the end. If you do good liquor sales, you're coming back in eight weeks, twelve weeks. If you don't do good liquor sales, and you play these great original songs, they don't care (Les).

Other musicians draw a distinction between the weekday and weekend audiences, suggesting that:

> ...the weekends cater to more a blue-collar type crowd and they work, come home and they have a beer and they watch the game. And then Friday and Saturday come, and they want to go out and most of them are single and nobody can really go out dancing and meet people and dance to original music because they don't know the changes and let's face it, there's a lot of bad original acts out there

(Peter).

According to Les,

> ...let's say Friday or Saturday night, it's a cover bar. People want to come here and hear their favourite songs and dance[33].

The musicians agree that: a) the main interest of the tavern manager is to increase liquor sales; b) liquor consumption is increased when patrons are entertained and dance; and c) patrons are most likely to dance when the songs played by the band are familiar. Weinstein (1991: 74) also found that "club patrons generally want dance music". It is believed that the familiarity of a song is a crucial determinant in whether people will dance, and having heard the cover songs on the radio, they will be more familiar with the "changes" in the music. Cover songs are thus more conducive to dancing than are unfamiliar original songs.

A second convention in the audience-oriented performance concerns the choice of cover songs to be played. Decisions are based in part on the type of club musicians are performing in. For example, Les labelled clubs as venues for either classic or current rock:

> ...if you're talking cover material, a lot would have to do with the club...When we play here we do mostly new stuff, we throw in a couple Doors tunes and an old Black Sabbath tune. We play that because that's what works in the club.

Jake also decides between classic and current rock, but bases his decision on the demographics of the audience. He surveys the audience to determine their age; for a younger crowd he plays more current music, such as Pearl Jam, Lenny Cravits and the Chili Peppers; for an older crowd, he plays classic rock such as Bob Seager or Led Zeppelin. Set list decisions are also influenced by the music played by the DJ during set breaks: "The DJs get all the new tapes, and they're playing them during the breaks, and we see what people are dancing to, what people want" (Jake). Time and energy are also devoted to learning new cover songs. According to Jake, audience members tire of repetitive cover songs:

> (Do you play any cover songs?) Oh yeah, we just

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[33]The consequences of playing original songs in a 'cover' tavern are rather unclear. Only Les and Peter discussed some possible negative implications, and to the contrary Todd remarked that original songs "work well with some crowds". It is possible that the musicians take for granted that they are to play cover songs in the tavern, and do not give much thought to what might happen should they play more than a few originals. In retrospect, it would have been worthwhile to inquire further to this end during the interviews.

> don't do lots. We're all from bands that, like I've been doing this for ten years, and all the bands before this, like I've played a million cover songs. Like name a cover song that wasn't popular that I haven't learned. We still have to learn more because you have to keep it fresh every time you come around you know. People want to hear new stuff, and the band gets tired of playing the same old stuff. So you've got to play some new stuff for the people as well.

Thus, in the interest of increasing liquor sales and in turn their reputation and employability, the tavern musicians strategically construct an audience-oriented performance. To this end, it may be suggested from the evidence provided that the performance of cover songs is found to be more profitable than the performance of originals. Yet all musicians had an interest in composing and recording original music. In what follows I explore the place of the original-music venture within the logics of the tavern performance. Of concern is the process by which musicians, hired by the tavern manager to perform primarily cover songs, pursue the interest and resources of major record labels, and ways in which the tavern gig both enables and constrains this pursuit.

3. The original-music venture

> I want to be the best original band that I can possibly be you know. The next Pearl Jam or or even that would be nice, even if we ended up being Trooper or Tom Cochrane, really good you get paid to do album after album, you know that's what I want is to do my own music, and make a good living at it just doing my own music (Jake).

> You know I sound really negative about it, but it's been the best thing in my life, I've dreamed about doing what I'm doing right now. Having people recognize me on the streets, I've always dreamed about that. I wouldn't knock it but man I've got to tell you it's a scary business! (Peter, in reference to his record contract).

By virtue of being audience-oriented, the tavern performance constrains opportunities for the composition and performance of original music. I discuss these constraints shortly. First, I want to consider ways in which the cover-gig facilitates original-music interests. This discussion is based on interpretations provided by the musicians which reveal a certain construction of reality. Their interpretations are thought to enable their interest in and efforts toward pursuing tavern gigs, despite the rigid and constraining structure of the gig.

As mentioned, the tavern gig offers a means by which the musicians can earn a living and raise financial capital for their original-music ventures. At the same time, it also provides opportunities for the musicians to "prove" themselves as talented and "self-sufficient" artists. The theme of self-sufficiency was strongly present in all of the interview transcripts. The musicians interpret self-sufficiency as enhancing the likelihood that they will attract the interest of major record labels. There appears to be support for this interpretation in the literature; Berland (1991) and Théberge (1991), for example, make similar observations about the salience of self-sufficiency. And according to Brown (1991), the rise of independent labels enabled musicians to prove themselves prior to being signed to major labels. As a result,

> [p]eople who **deserved** record deals got them, since they had usually already released their own product and perhaps even had a video (352; emphasis added).

This account is, however, problematic, as it ignores the structural configuration of the music industry which constrains potentially equally-"deserving" musicians from signing deals. This should become evident as this discussion unfolds.

The record deal is the pinnacle of success for the rock musicians' career. According to Weinstein, "[t]he record company is the artist's major connection to the system for producing and disseminating culture" (1991: 77). The chances of local tavern musicians signing deals with major record labels are slim and the competition is high. While the recruitment of new artists is necessary for the reproduction of the musical culture (Weinstein, 1991: 60), supply in the market is significantly greater than demand. As a result, musicians must literally prove their worth before a record company will show interest. With respect to organizing, recording and promoting the band, Jake replied that "we have to do it all ourselves". Further,

> They don't just give you money, they're like a bank, you know a record company. To get that loan from the bank, you have to say we're an up and coming band, we've got five or ten albums in us, we're good enough to be the next Rush or the next Led Zeppelin...They don't want to sign a band that can only put out one album. You know one guy's got a drug problem, the other guy's got ten kids, the other guy drops off the road cause he can't take it and the other guy, like you know they're not looking for bands like that...To get to that thing you have to show the record companies that you can almost do it on your own before they'll say these guys have it together, you know these guys have sold a couple thousand CD's on their own, they've got songs that look like they've got potential,

> they're writing more songs, you know they're not drug-addicted nuts, you know all these things (Jake)[34].

Writing on the American popular music industry, Weinstein (1991) suggests that despite efforts toward self-sufficiency, most bands do not sign a record deal. The musicians in this study, however, displayed a certain optimism:

> There's a million bands out there submitting stuff to record companies, not everybody gets signed. You know like we're sending stuff out to record companies and, and we're hoping that we can get signed, get signed by getting interest from the record companies... (Jake).

Though only Jake expressed this optimism, it is not unreasonable to suggest that all were relatively optimistic; if they felt that there was very little chance that they would sign a deal, it is unlikely that they would continue to pursue this end. Struggling to make it as self-sufficient artists, playing the cover scene in taverns, the musicians hold on then to the dream that one day resources will come from sources other than their continuous labour. There is hope that one day they will secure the resources of the record company, which will leave time and resources for what matters most: the creation and performance of original music.

### 3.1. Record-deal resources

If the musicians can prove themselves worthy of record company support, they have it made:

> ...they do everything for a band if a band shows like they can deliver, they'll come up with incredible amounts of money (Todd).

The record deal brings financial support and transportation:

> There's no record company to put you on a monthly wage. Like if you get signed to a record company, they put in tons and tons of money to make a go of

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[34]Jake was the only musician to articulate an awareness of the need to be self-sufficient; his point of reference was what the record company will do for a band, and thus what a band must do for themselves when not signed. While the other musicians did interpret themselves as self-sufficient, they may not conceive it to be a prerequisite in securing a record deal; they might, in fact, interpret this quality as relatively rare in the industry. The point I wish to make below, however, has less to do with the musicians' explanations of **why** they are self-sufficient, than it does with the fact that they interpret themselves as self-sufficient, and that this appears to be a shared interpretation.

things for you. They pay you to take time off, like I say they pay for your tour buses (Jake);

promotion resources:

If you do really good on the first album, and you show good progress, the next album they'll put more money into you. And that's what you need is that promotion, that money money money. It's always money (Rob).

The guy that's got the number one album on the Billboard charts in America wasn't there because he had the best song, he's there because his record company probably paid a lot of kick backs to get him in a position. Like billboards, on TV shows, they put a fortune into this guy just to get him popular enough, got him on the David Letterman show, got him on all these shows, and all of a sudden he's big, his record all of a sudden is going people are buying it. But the person who is actually responsible, the people who are responsible for controlling who's number one billboard, which you know if you're number one billboard, I mean, you're huge. You're a millionaire, you must be a millionaire to get there because the kick backs, the money, to be on the cover of Rolling Stone (Jake);

places to compose and record:

Then you get a record deal, and like I say they put you on maybe a three, four hundred dollar a week salary to write songs, they pay you to write songs. You know you sit around here on a five, six hour day schedule, you know four or five days a week, they pay for your rehearsal time, they set up the gear, you show up, they've got a little house for you to live in. Like you know the bigger you get, the bigger the whole situation gets (Jake);

and people to take care of business:

...these guys, they have tour managers all around. Like Joe Blow will do everything for them. Their suppers waiting for them after the show, you know, like because they want to keep their minds clear, concentrate on their performance, not worrying about "I don't have strings to tune my guitar" you know. Well I do, I have to go out in thirty below in Edmonton and try to find strings to tune my guitar. You know, and the show's coming up and I've got to fix my own guitar. These guys he breaks his guitar and they have a brand new one there the next night because the record company knows that they're going to sell billions of dollars worth of sales so they believe in them so they give them the money, they do anything they want (Jake).

### 3.2. Tavern gigs as enabling

Although the logics of the tavern gig do not permit the performance of original music, the gig is interpreted by the musicians to provide opportunities for the promotion of their independent albums, and to offer sites for demonstrations of self-sufficiency. Peter, the only musician of those interviewed to have successfully secured record company interest, attributes his success to being self-sufficient:

> The reason that we got a record deal is that we're so self-sufficient...we produced largely ourselves...we play the local clubs, and then we all had odd jobs which payed for our recording costs...We've done everything. We've done all our own art work all the time, we've booked all our own tours.

Although the others had not yet been signed, all perceived themselves to be self-sufficient both in terms of their original-music interests and setting up, organizing, and executing the tavern performance. According to Jake,

> ...we've got to worry about radio stations, newspapers, booking agents have got to get you the best gigs all the time, we've got to get our stuff into the record stores and you have to follow it up and talk to them all the time and make sure things are going good and they've got product there and the bar manager's, the bar's playing and promoting you, promoting you and playing your CD before you get to the gig. Before you get to the gig you call them up and go "Hey how's it going, are you playing a couple songs are people getting into it" you know.
>
> Yeah you're selling yourself in a way but you're shopping it (the independent album) to the record companies. You bring it to the record companies, you get your promo stuff all together, get tapes with all your demos, group pictures, a little bio, send it off to record companies, as many as you can. There's a thousand of them out there, there's fifty in every country, and there's guys in different departments. You can get publishing deals, you can get actual live music deals, you can get a guy who, a publishing thing where you just write songs for other people, you can get a deal for that. You can get a distribution deal where they'll put your stuff into all the stores, but they're not wiling to put up big bucks. You have to do a lot of it yourself (Jake).

Rob also referred to himself as having always been "basically self-managed"; Todd claimed that "we're basically all pretty much self-run"; and in discussing his album, Peter remarked:

> [w]e've done everything. We've done all our own art work all the time, we've booked all our own tours.

According to Jake, being self-sufficient also involves negotiations with agents and tavern managers, trying to get his band "booked in the best gigs all the time". From these statements it may be suggested that musicians interpret their self-sufficiency as contributing to an image of being both motivated and responsible.

The self-sufficient musician is responsible for band promotion and exposure. Promotion involves securing interviews with local radio stations and music magazines. The media is thought to promote the band, help create an audience, and, as a result, contribute to the band's positive reputation in the local music scene. According to Jake, the goal is to:

> Get the exposure, people see us and go out and buy your album. But you have to make sure that you're album's available, or it's a waste of time, if they can't get a hold of your product. Selling it in the bars, getting it into the stores... See if it's in the stores, even if there's a couple in every store, we **need** people to buy our products, we need people to see us. And that's really important.

The tavern gig enables musicians to gain exposure and to develop a following. By playing the occasional original song in his tavern performance, Jake feels that he is "pushing the product, little by little, and word's getting around you know, people are starting to know who we are". Peter interprets the turn-out at a tavern performance to be an indication of his band's popularity: "you start getting a little more popularity, start having people who know who you are coming to see you". The tavern performance is also a venue for the sale of their original-music recordings. Jake sells his CD during the cover show:

> To make it, we're going to put our CD out, we're going to continue to push it in the bar, and hopefully we will, we're selling enough to break even on our CD, this is **our** route, you know (Jake).

Musicians distribute their original music to tavern DJ's, and sell their CD to tavern patrons between performance sets. Without a distribution deal, they are also responsible for consigning their independent albums to record stores. Playing on the tavern circuit enhances mobility; a Western Canadian tour can take them to towns and cities in which they can personally consign their albums. For example, both Jake and Rob distributed their albums to record stores while in Edmonton to perform. Further, when in Edmonton Peter visited the record store which carries his album, in the interest of establishing a friendly rapport with the employees. Enhanced mobility also enables radio and magazine promotion. Peter, for example, held an interview with a local music magazine, which also carried a review of his album.

### 3.3. Access to resources: Internal contradiction

The tavern gig enables self-promotion and self-sufficiency, thought to facilitate the record deal. At the same time, Jake perceives a contradiction in the structure of the industry. According to Jake, he must prove himself before he gets resources from the record companies, but without those resources, the chances of successful self-promotion are slim:

> The record company is the main, if you can get a record deal, that's the main thing to get 'cause you get big money, they've got the money. If you're doing it like us, we're still doing it all on our own so I have to get on the phone all day and I have to do all these things, running around town...

Further, he feels that most recording artists did not actually prove their worth **until** they got signed to a record contract:

> And like Ugly Kid Joe they're like, they're young and that album's out and they're twenty, maybe twenty one. I mean you know what I'm talking about, Ugly Kid Joe "I Hate Everything About You", big song, right? And they got a lucky-break, they got signed, they're out there **now** they're developing the band. They've got people helping them develop, probably taking voice lessons because now they got big record company money, and they're helping develop the band to make them better, their next album is going to be better. Same with Guns'n'Roses. They've got good songs but that first album musically-sucked (Jake).

The reality is, for Jake, that within the existing structure of the industry, most talent goes unnoticed:

> Metallica I heard and some other bands put out two or three independents, and they weren't signed because the record company didn't believe in their music, they didn't think that, some people's art, you know I always go back to art because it's a lot like that too, when you paint a picture and it's worth nothing, you know and in a hundred years, it's worth a lot. And who's to say what's going to be worth something in a hundred years...

Thus, musicians understand the tavern gig to facilitate their original-music interests: it offers a source of funding, a method of self-promotion and a place to prove self-sufficiency. At the same time, there is potentially a contradiction in the industry: musicians must prove themselves to get signed, and once signed, the record deal brings resources which further promote the development of their talent. However, without record company support, they may find it difficult to "prove" themselves. Thus, the tavern gig is perceived as enabling, but the structure of the industry in general may, at least in part, constrain the pursuit of original-music endeavour.

### 3.4. Tavern gigs as constraining

Several factors indicate that the tavern gig is understood by musicians to compromise their original-music pursuits. There is evidence to suggest a contradiction between the need to accommodate the demands of the tavern, and concurrently negotiate one's time and resources in the pursuit of record contracts.

First, playing the tavern scene is a demanding job. When on tour a band can play up to 16 consecutive weeks, travelling from town to town, sometimes playing from Vancouver to Ontario and back. Musicians are contracted to perform between one and six nights a week. They are responsible for setting up and tearing down their stage set, packing their gear, and transporting themselves to the next gig, often in run-down vans and buses. Once at the gig, they perform each night from 10:00 p.m. until 2:00 a.m., playing three sets of fifty minutes each with forty minute breaks in between. After the show, it takes time to come down from the high of the live performance, and from whatever other substances have fuelled the last four hours of high-energy performance. It is not unusual for sleep to come as late as six in the morning. Late nights make for late days, and by early to mid afternoon the band leader finds himself out in the community, taking care of practical needs (buying guitar strings or parts for the van), or on the phone with his agent setting up the next gig. If he's lucky, he might have time for sightseeing or shopping, visiting with friends or family he might have in town, or practising new (typically cover) songs with his band.

Thus, the time and energy necessary to compose and practice original music is in short supply for the tavern musicians:

> Doing the big club scene you get caught up in it too much, because...you go six nights, travel, go six nights for the next gig. You're always getting ready for the next **show**. Because it's the big show, if you don't put on the big show that the club manager wants to see, then you don't go back (Peter).

Though the gig does, in the ways mentioned, facilitate the original-music endeavour, the demands of the tavern performance are thought to compromise the creative expression necessary for the creation of original music. Creative expression is critical to the musicians:

> ...the genesis of this thing is all about the fact that for some reason or another I write songs. I don't know why, but I do. I get song ideas in my head...if you've got song ideas, then you want to you know, express them. Otherwise they really don't exist. And as soon as you express them, then the secondary element is having these things on tape.

> Then it becomes a tangible item. And the completion of this whole thing, is when someone buys it. And now they own, what was originally an intangible idea that you had, you know? (Rob).

For Rob, being creative is, however:

> ...maybe twenty percent of the whole thing. The rest of it is dealing with the never ending personnel problems, agents or musicians, bar managers, you name it, I mean you just fucking name it.

The other musicians articulated similar concerns:

> ...you lose the artistic, you're not even an artist any more. You don't even feel like writing. You lose your ideas. The more you write, you know it's like any job, the more you do it the better you get at it. If you're not getting the chance to write, and play your stuff live, then you're not getting any better at your craft. That's your craft (Jake).

> What I think it takes to make it is a clear head, and very professionally organized, to have good songs and as far as good songs is concerned, we still don't write half as much as we should write you know because of all this stuff we've talked about. We get caught up in making money, making money, I mean how do you survive and still write album after album worth of songs? (Jake).

> I'm so bored with it, with the standard stock, you know oh, you're quitting, ok, have to phone another guitar player. Or so and so can't make it, or so and so is drunk, you know whatever. You just deal with it and become emotionally detached. And I think if you're dealing with an art form like music, then you have to feel that there's emotional attachment (Peter).

> ...I do the road managing and I do the booking with the agents and I take part in writing the songs, I take part in performing the music where I wish I didn't have to do any of that stuff, I wish I could just write songs, and play the songs (Jake).

> ...you're on the **road** and you're doing shit on the road, trying to make a living, worrying about your cover performance, worrying about playing dance songs for a bunch of drunk fucks who don't give a shit half the time anyway. Like I say you can be a shitty band but if you play the right songs, then you're playing there every eight weeks, you know. It doesn't matter if you're the best writer in the world (As long as you sell drinks?) Yeah, as long

as you sell drinks (Rob)[35].

The irony of the situation, for one musician, is that the longer he deals with the hassles, the better he gets at it. In other words, a musician can become quite competent at being self-sufficient, that necessary ingredient for a record deal. Yet increased self-sufficiency compromises the development of his talent:

> ...here's the irony. I'm better at this whole thing, like I'm in better form now than I've ever been in my whole life. Like I can sing better, I can deal with things better, I'm the best personal manager that I've ever been, my own manager, I feel can handle everything, I know probably every city, I can access equipment, a gig, agents, bar managers, you know who to talk to, who not to talk to, I've got the whole network. And yet ironically, this is it... I'm fed up with it and I find that, that the original idea is uh, is uh, evaporating, it's lost (Rob).

According to Jake,

> ...being a musician you should be an artist at the same time. You shouldn't let your self get caught being, doing what I've been doing for the last ten years. I guess an entertainer, you get stuck in a rut because you get the money, it's comfortable, you get hotel rooms, it's comfortable, you go from town to town and you play all these other songs, and if you do well you get to go back and you can make a lot of money doing it if you do it properly. You know, keep your overhead down, do it properly. But to do the original thing is the most important thing. Should be for any musician.

Jake's narrative can be read as follows: if an original musician is skilled at playing the taverns, he can secure himself quite nicely in a place he would rather not be.

The struggle between appeasing the demands of the tavern performance with an entertaining, audience-oriented show, and concurrently fostering the creative element, is summarized by Jake:

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[35]Though it makes intuitive sense that the tavern performance would consume time and other resources which might otherwise be directed toward the original-music pursuits, only three of the five musicians discussed this. That Todd did not may be attributed to the fact that our interview was short and focused less on his tavern performance; and this may have been of less concern to Les simply because he was not touring at the time of the interview, and thus did not immediately experience the demands that a tour places on a musician.

> You get money, and you've got it. You've got the money, I mean, what do you do? I mean you've got everything if you've got the money. You know like if you've got the money you've got all new equipment, everybody's got a new wireless, you're happy. You're on stage, you're a hundred times happier. You're on tour in a Greyhound bus. You're happy. You're not cold any more, you know, they (record companies) pay you to take time off every couple months to write more songs. So you have more songs. They pay you. Right now we can't, for us to take two weeks off, you know one of the guys has a baby back in Vancouver. How do you afford, how does he afford to feed his baby. You know there's all these trials and tribulations of being an artist, of being an original musician. It's comfortable playing the bars, as long as you do what the bar manager wants, what the people want. The originals? They couldn't care in a lot of clubs, because they want to see you make them dance so they pay you more. Like I say it's where the whole catch 22 thing is, where the better you do in that club, the sooner you come back, you get your money you get your weekly wage, put a little bit away for a rainy day, flat tire, insurance stuff like that. And then you think ok when are we going to take time off to write new songs? You get up at eleven o'clock, noon, some of the guys sleep until four, that depends, and then at that point, they, what do you do? You run downstairs, grab a cup of coffee, go into the bar and practice and try to be artistic and write the Mona Lisa, or your version of it and then you've got to come back and have supper and jump in the shower and go play for four hours and do this six nights a week?

## 4. Chapter Summary

The musicians interviewed interpret themselves as self-sufficient and self-managed, and they all aspire to "making it" as original artists. In the interest of raising money to support themselves and their original-music productions, they contract their services to "cover" taverns. To earn a positive reputation and thereby increase their employment chances, musicians construct an audience-oriented performance with the intent of encouraging liquor sales. It is felt that patrons drink more when dancing, and because their original music is less conducive to dancing, musicians play primarily cover songs.

The tavern gig both enables and constrains the musicians' original-music pursuits, as does the structure of the music

industry in general. The gig offers opportunities for the musicians to prove themselves as self-sufficient, gain promotion and exposure, sell independent recordings, and it enables the mobility necessary for consigning their product to record stores. While this is interpreted as necessary to attract record company interest, one musician finds it difficult to "prove" himself without the resources that bands receive once signed. Finally, while the gig offers a means to financing the original-music interests and prove self-sufficiency, accommodating the demands of the tavern-gig compromises the time, energy and creativity thought necessary to become successful, original artists.

# Chapter Five: Interpretive Frameworks and the Symbolic Code

## 1. Introduction

> The buyer's market in metal creates pressure on aspiring bands to conform to commercial codes of aural and visual acceptability, and to adopt an instrumental approach to achieving success (Weinstein, 1991: 76).

In Chapter 4 I presented interview passages which, together with my interpretation, served to situate the tavern musician in an uneasy space between the demands of the tavern performance and those of the original-music venture. I alluded to a number of strategies by which the musicians manage their resources. In the interest of earning a living, raising economic capital to finance original-music recordings, and proving to record companies their ability for self-promotion and self-sufficiency, the musicians contract their services to cover-tavern managers. To increase their reputation and thus their employment chances, they adhere to a number of tavern-performance conventions. It is generally understood that liquor sales are higher when bands play cover songs and pursue other audience-oriented strategies.

By performing in cover-taverns, musicians hope to raise the resources necessary to prove themselves worthy of record company investment. At the same time, the demands of the tavern gig and of being self-managed compromise the creativity, time and energy necessary to excel in original-music pursuits. Without record label resources, musicians must secure resources themselves, which is thought to constrain their potential. Tavern musicians are clearly at a structural disadvantage; access to resources is restricted, financing comes only after they have proven themselves, and struggles for resources on the tavern circuit compromise chances for original-music success. This realization by no means originates with this study. Weinstein, for example, writes that "[b]ands are quasi-independent enterprises that are at a disadvantage in their encounter with concentrated economic power" (1991: 77).

According to Thompson (1990), three structural positions (subordinate, intermediate and dominant) configure the social hierarchy, characterized by increasingly greater access to resources. According to this framework, tavern musicians occupy a subordinate position, defined by Thompson as a position which "offer(s) access to the smallest qualities of capital of differing kinds" (160). Alternatively,

> [i]ntermediate positions within a field are those which offer access to one kind of capital but not another, or which offer access to different kinds

> of capital but in qualities which are more limited than those available to dominant individuals or groups (Thompson, 1990: 159).

And those in dominant positions "have privileged access to resources or capital of various kinds" (Thompson, 1990: 158). As subordinate-position holders, tavern musicians are at a structural disadvantage in that they depend on the tavern gig for resources critical to pursuing their original-music ventures. In order to secure those resources, they must follow conventions which typify the "backstage" and "frontstage" logics of the cover-tavern performance (Goffman, 1959). Frontstage refers to that which is observable during the performance; backstage refers to the "business" of being a musician: dealing with agents, managers, and recording and promotion personnel. Backstage, the artist functions as "a commodity for the media to sell", and frontstage he functions as "a culture hero for the audience to admire" (Weinstein, 1991: 199).

Together, the struggle to secure resources and the demands of the front- and back-stage might appear to negate opportunities for artistic expression. Weinstein, for example, suggests that:

> [a] predominantly commercial apparatus caters to a subculture that holds as its highest virtue remaining a proud pariah from that apparatus and the incentives that sustain it. Yet both the apparatus and the subculture need each other... the subculture pays and the apparatus delivers. But the artists cannot forget it, because they are between both worlds, commodities to one and culture heros to the other, never what they are most to themselves: artists (1991: 234-235).

According to Thompson's framework, tavern musicians occupy a subordinate position, and, according to Weinstein, by holding this position and accommodating the demands of it, the musician is "never an artist".

The point of departure for this chapter is to turn to the interpretive frameworks of the musicians, to suggest that while they have restricted access to resources, they employ a number of interpretive strategies to make sense of their structural position and their relationship to their artistic creativity. I begin with an introduction to the symbolic structure of the tavern performance, and discuss "strategies of symbolic valuation", pursued by occupants of subordinate, intermediate and dominant positions. In the remainder of this chapter I look at each dimension of the performance code: the sonic, visual and verbal, to suggest ways in which the symbolic codes are appropriated and interpreted by the musicians in the pursuit of sites for artistic creativity. I argue that while tavern musicians occupy a subordinate

position in terms of their access to resources, they in fact pursue strategies of symbolic valuation typical of those in subordinate, intermediate and dominant positions.

## 2. Symbolic structure: The performance code

Popular music can be conceived in terms of "inventions" and "conventions"; inventions are "the unique insights, discoveries, and aesthetic techniques contributed by the musician's creative process", and conventions are "the socially shared stereotypes, formulae, myths, and musical patterns lodged in the 'collective mind', or the musical heritage" (Lewis, 1983: 137). The tavern performance requires that the musicians adhere to certain conventions embodied in a "performance code"[36]. This code is comprised of three dimensions: the sonic, the visual and the verbal. The sonic code refers to the music itself, and in this study refers to the distinction between cover and original songs. The visual code includes visual appearance (dress, hair, jewellery), and the verbal code refers to "stage talk", or that which the musician says to the audience over the microphone during his performance.

The tavern industry is not, in the words of Weinstein, "an equal-opportunity employer (1991: 63). Symbolic codes are well established and deviations, while acceptable within limits, must be curtailed in the interest of maintaining employment as a tavern musician. Three dimensions of the symbolic code organize the following analysis, in which I seek to elucidate strategies through which the musicians pursue artistic creativity within the structure of the cover-tavern performance. This analysis begins with an introduction to various strategies of symbolic valuation characteristic of occupants of subordinate, intermediate and dominant structural positions.

### 2.2. Strategies of symbolic valuation

When sonic, visual and verbal symbolic forms are considered in the context of the tavern performance, they are "ascribed a certain 'symbolic value'", valued as either "precious or denounced, cherished or despised" (Thompson, 1990: 154-55). Thompson discusses "typical strategies" of "symbolic valuation" and "their links to different positions" (1990: 158). Dominant position-holders pursue strategies of distinction, derision and condescension. Through distinction, they "seek to distinguish themselves from individuals or groups who occupy positions subordinate to them" (Thompson,

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[36]Similarly, in their (1983) study of the British punk scene, Levine and Stumpf discovered a "code" of punk (428).

1990: 158)[37]. With strategies of derision, actors regard "the symbolic forms produced by those below them as brash, gauche, immature or unrefined" (Thompson, 1990: 159). Finally, through condescension actors praise "symbolic forms in a way that puts down their producers and reminds them of their subordinate position" which, according to Thompson, "enables individuals in dominant positions to reaffirm their dominance without openly declaring it" (1990: 159).

Typical strategies of those occupying intermediate positions include: a) moderation, in which "individuals positively value those goods which they know to be within their reach"; b) pretension, in which actors pretend "to be what they are not and (seek) thereby to assimilate themselves to positions which are superior to their own"; and c) devaluation, in which actors in intermediate positions "devalue or debunk the symbolic forms" produced by those in dominant positions (Thompson, 1990: 159-160).

Finally, those in subordinate positions employ strategies of: a) practicality: "as individuals who are more preoccupied than others with the necessities of survival, they may ascribe more value than others do to objects which are practical in design and functional in everyday life"; b) respectful resignation, in which "the forms produced by individual occupying superior positions are regarded **as superior**, that is, as worthy of respect; but it is a strategy of resignation in so far as the superiority of these forms, and hence the inferiority of one's own products, is accepted as inevitable" (Thompson, 1990: 160; emphasis original); and c) rejection, in which forms produced by those in superior positions are rejected, but in doing so "individuals in subordinate positions may find a way of affirming the value of their own products and activities without fundamentally disrupting the unequal distribution of resources characteristic of the field" (Thompson, 1990: 161).

While structurally disadvantaged by restricted access to resources, tavern musicians employ certain strategies through which sites of originality are pursued. The structural position of the musician is mediated by interpretations of the symbolic performance code, and it is through such interpretation that the musician as "creative artist" is enabled. In what follows, I re-interpret the musicians' interview accounts in order to elucidate such strategies. As mentioned, three dimensions of the performance code organize this discussion: the sonic, the visual and the verbal. Each is considered in turn in the remainder of this chapter.

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[37]Thompson refers the reader to Bourdieu's use of this concept in chapters one and three of his "Distinction".

## 3. The sonic dimension

As we saw in Chapter 4, tavern musicians understand that they must play cover rather than original music in their tavern performances. This sonic convention was attributed to the type of tavern (a venue for covers), and the demands of the audience. Cover songs were thought to facilitate the profit-motivated agenda of the tavern manager, and to thus contribute to the favourable reputation and employability of the musicians.

In this section I illustrate a number of alternative interpretations of the sonic conventions of the tavern performance. In doing so, I draw at times on the notion of symbolic valuation, to suggest strategies pursued by musicians to interpret their structural position(s) in the hierarchy of the music industry. In this way I hope to convey an understanding of the tavern musician as not simply a passive subject caught in a constraining structural position, but as an active agent negotiating ways to make sense of himself and his position.

### 3.1. Definition through distinction

One strategy pursued in the interpretation of the sonic code is "definition through distinction". Through definitions of self, constructed through distinction from others, musicians negotiate their interpretation of self; although they perform cover songs in the tavern, it does not follow that they interpret themselves as "cover musicians". Rather, they define themselves and their band as "original", and draw distinctions, based on criteria of originality, between their band and both known and anonymous, typified others. Distinctions include those drawn between a) their own as "original" bands and others as "cover" bands; and b) themselves as recorded artists and others as having not recorded. Through distinction and self-definition, tavern musicians are found to pursue strategies of symbolic valuation typical of those individuals occupying subordinate, intermediate **and** dominant positions.

Musicians defined their band and their music in a number of ways. Only two offered definitions related to genre[38]; a more

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[38]Defining popular music is difficult at best. According to Weinstein, the boundaries of the various genres of popular music are best referred to as 'smudges', and "[t]he debates over the boundaries of the genre underscore its complex heritage" (1991: 15). Jake called his a "rock band", and Todd defined his music as "hard rock". Les and Peter, when prompted, agreed to define their music through the label I had

popular strategy was to describe the music with reference to popular recording artists. Jake, for example, when asked what kind of music he played, replied:

> [y]ou could probably put it in the category like Aerosmith, Van Halen, Chili Peppers, stuff like that.

Les compared his music to that of Tragically Hip, The Pursuit of Happiness, 44-40, Metallica, Megadeath, and even ABBA, and Peter cited Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath as influencing the music of his band.

Another strategy was to define their band and music as "original", despite performing primarily cover songs in the tavern. Jake, for instance, began the interview by saying:

> We're just a rock band. Doing original stuff. We do our own stuff now, we've all played in bands for a long, long time.

And later, when discussing the hardships of being on the road, he referred again to himself as an "artist...an original musician". Discussing stereotypes towards musicians, Peter reflected on his experience to suggest that "original musicians are treated pretty poorly". Note the self-identification as "original". Todd also defined his band as "original" rather than "cover", and though Rob did not define his band as either "original" or "cover", he made reference to his original CD when asked what kind of music he played; finally, Les referred to his band as being both original and cover, stating that he considered the two to be distinct entities.

Band definition as "original" was accompanied by distinctions between the musicians' bands and both known and anonymous, typified others. The "other" refers to what we may call a "cover band", or those who play exclusively cover songs in their tavern performance. Rob, for example, referred to those musicians who played in a band but did not pursue careers as original musicians as "wankers". Asked to define a wanker, he replied:

> ...just some shithead that wants to get a lot of attention. You know, and you don't even have to play in a band. I mean I know people that have got great hair, and can form a few chords with their hands, but are always just on the verge of forming

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provided ('alternative'), but were reluctant to do so, each qualifying the designation. When asked if their music was 'alternative', Les responded "I guess", explaining that the term, though popular now, would not have been appropriate three years ago; Peter agreed that his music is "alternative", but added that the label is somewhat "meaningless".

> a band or just rehearsing. And they never ever but you know they just, like who cares you know but this guy figures hey man I'm getting fucked, you know. So that's the attraction.

According to Rob, music, for wankers, "[has] got nothing to do with art"; wankers perform for the status of playing in a band. Shortly after this statement, Rob referred to himself as an artist, thereby setting up the distinction between himself and those others perceived to be "wankers". Jake made a similar reference to those musicians whom he interprets to have not pursued original-music interests:

> ...a lot of bands, you see them come and go. You see them here, you see one band playing in the R------, four months later you see them again, it's all different guys. A couple guys got day jobs, a couple younger guys came into the scene, they keep rotating around and around and around, and they just get a kick cause oh they get to meet chicks, drinking free beers and they get to be in the lime light pretending their David Lee Roth for four hours a night and, maybe that's all they want out of it. And I can name off tons of guys, all the guys from the olden days, none of them made it, none of them are doing shit.

Peter also drew a distinction between cover and original bands; defining his current band as original, he stated that "any cover band" should try to produce original music as well. Presupposing this statement is the interpretation that some cover bands do not pursue original-music ventures.

Though neither Les nor Todd drew explicit distinctions between their's as an "original" band and others as "cover" bands, all but Todd referred to other bands as less serious musicians[39]; some compared those who do not perform original music to a "human juke box", and all seemed to hold those others in low regard[40]. Discussing his current band, Jake said:

> And these guys I'm playing with now are a lot more serious, about what we're doing. We're all writing. And the other band was more of a cover band, you know. We started to do some writing and stuff like

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[39]The literature on music has traditionally made polarizing distinctions between "popular" and "serious" music (ie. Adorno, 1978; Stebbins, 1976). It is interesting to note that similar distinctions are made within popular music by the artists themselves.

[40]Fredrickson and Rooney (1988), in their study of free-lance classical musicians, similarly found those musicians to hold in low esteem those others who only accompany others "and has no reputation as a player in his own right" (231).

> that but it just didn't quite work out. (A serious band is one that writes songs?) Yeah.

Though Les did not hold the musicians themselves in low regard for playing only cover songs, he did speak negatively about the situation of the cover musician. In reference to bands who "just start out playing covers", he said:

> Initially when you start, you want to pick up girls and you want to be popular and all that. The longer you do it the more you find out that's just shit. You know it really is, it's just crap.

After this statement Les continued with a discussion of the virtues of creating original music[41]. Later, Les referred to popular original musicians (Hay Wire and Trooper) as being "real", as opposed to those bands who play only cover songs.

Both Rob and Jake referred to those who do not perform original music as a "juke box", and Peter referred to the band that plays only covers as "a bubble gum, spandex-vagina band". He interpreted the cover musician to hold a "rock-star attitude", noting that his band, though perhaps more worthy of such an attitude given that they pursue original music, does not have such an attitude. Finally, Jake felt that "to do the original thing is the most important thing. Should be for any musician". And according to Peter,

> I can't tell you how good it feels, to be getting some recognition on stuff <u>we</u> did, you know and every band's got to do that, it's just it's sanity man. How long can you do, as much as I like Def Leppard, how long can you look out, wave your tush, 'hysteria'. You know, and how many bar bands have you heard to rock and roll by Led Zeppelin, or ZZ Top. Aw I could go on forever. And I think it's bad.

Jake also distinguished himself from the situation of the cover band by denouncing his own future involvement in cover bands, and by denigrating those others whom he interpreted as

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[41]Shortly after these remarks, Les went on to offer support for the value of playing only cover songs. He described a division in the industry between cover and original bands, noting that "people in this industry point fingers, you know 'oh those guys they only do Tragically Hip'. Cover bands are at each other: 'Jesus, we were doing that Guns'n'Roses tune first, they copied us'. And original bands go 'Jesus, you guys are musically self-indulgent. You guys aren't musicians you guys are just a cover band, you're whores'." He then supported the cover band by saying that at least they can work full-time as musicians, whereas the original musician "must work as a dishwasher in some local restaurant".

"stuck in the cover rut" indefinitely:

> I'm not going to do the cover thing any more. And I still refuse, I'm not going to go out and play strictly the cover thing ever again (Jake).

According to Jake, "one day what B-- will be is just an original band".

Clearly, the musicians distinguish their present band both from those whom they interpret to perform strictly cover music, and, in the case of Jake, from previous involvement in a cover band. It appears as though cover bands are for the most part held in low regard, as the musicians criticize the situation of the cover musician and espouse the virtues of pursuing original-music ventures. It can be argued then that the musicians employ strategies of symbolic valuation typical of actors in dominant structural positions (distinction and derision), despite having restricted access to resources.

Some of the musicians also drew distinctions between themselves and other musicians on the basis of having recorded. According to Jake, "not many bands bother doing this (recording original albums)". In reference to other musicians whom he knows on the tavern circuit, Jake stated that:

> They're all still, I don't know any of them that did, from Western Canada, I can't even think of one that made it, yet. None of them even did our stature, or our level, you know putting a CD out **independently** is a big deal, without the money and the financing it's a big deal.

Rob refers to the production of his album as "a miraculous accomplishment", and says that:

> ...lets say out of a body of a thousand bands, how many are likely to get to the stage of even actually recording, no first of all writing their own material and then secondly getting your own material recorded and then thirdly, getting that material that was recorded, in the hands of anybody that can do anything positive about it, and then from there how many of those, that are able to actually get anything positive done with the fucking little piece of shit, you know...You know you sort of, when I got, I got this recording contract, and that's an incredible accomplishment on it's own, you know, a recording contract.

Further, according to Peter:

> ...we're one of the few bands that, from the last eight years that Western Canada, Western Canadian bar scene has put product out, that put a CD out. I've got friends that have never put any product out at all.

Here Peter identifies himself as a recording artist, and, as such, as being relatively unique. The perceived scarcity of

recording musicians may enhance the salience of the accomplishment. Despite the fact that this musician plays primarily cover songs in the tavern, he interprets himself as a recording artist, and in doing so situates himself in a position potentially superior to those who have not recorded.

Recording, however, does not appear to be the unique feat that the tavern musicians portray it to be. All but one musician interviewed had recorded, and the majority of bands playing in the tavern, though not interviewed, were known to have recorded independent albums. It may be suggested that the musicians articulate the "pretence" of being "closer" to the recording-end of the musical hierarchy than other bands. Returning to Thompson's link between strategies of symbolic valuation and structural position, this re-interpretation of the musicians' narratives illustrates the use of a strategy typically used by those in intermediate positions (pretence). Thus, while it is difficult to conceive tavern musicians as holding structurally dominant or intermediate positions, through their interpretive frameworks they negotiate their place, pursuing strategies of symbolic valuation typical of those in higher structural positions.

### 3.2. Exploring the contradiction

In what follows I address the apparent contradiction between the subordinate structural-position of the tavern musicians and their use of strategies of symbolic valuation typical of individuals in dominant and intermediate positions. To understand the contradiction between the musicians' identification and distinction of self on the basis of originality, and the observed practice of performing cover songs in the tavern, I discuss how the musicians: a) distinguish the tavern gig from the original-music venture; and b) situate the performance of cover songs temporally. Throughout this section I suggest ways in which the interpretive frameworks of the musicians might serve to both enable and constrain the realization of sonic creativity.

#### 3.2.1. Distinction: Cover- and original-music interests

The musicians interpret their adherence to the sonic requirements of the tavern performance by understanding the cover and original practices as two distinct entities, and by then disassociating the sonic practices of the tavern gig from their interests in original-music composition and recording.

First, musicians distinguish the cover gig from the original-music venture. According to Jake, "[b]eing a cover band and being an original band are, well should be two totally different things". Jake later distinguished between musicians who perform in the tavern and ones who pursue original-music

ventures. With respect to the former, he said that "[b]eing a musician, it's not even about our art". Clearly, the "art" is considered an entity distinct from the tavern performance. Rob also drew a distinction between the cover performance and the original-music venture. With respect to the cover gig, he said:

> I think it only exists in a transitory state. I don't think it exists as a career or as a stable thing. I think that you sort of pass through the bullshit... (Rob).

Rob later said that even if he stops giving tavern performances, he will never stop being an artist. The distinction drawn by Les between the cover and original ventures is even more acute: "[t]he original band is a very separate entity from this", with "this" referring to the tavern performance. Les is not in two bands, but rather draws a symbolic distinction between the performance of covers and the performance of original music.

Not only do the musicians draw distinctions between the cover- and original-music ventures, they also draw distinctions between the possible venues for the performance of each kind of music. The point to note is that the musicians interviewed did not "misinterpret" the tavern at which they were performing as a site for original-music performance; in other words, they seemed to know that if they wanted to play originals, they would have to pursue gigs in clubs which specifically host original bands. In the words of Les,

> If you're at P-----, people don't want to hear originals...If you go to the B-----, you'll hear originals. The clubs themselves attract their own clientele, right?

Todd and Jake both said that they perform cover songs in the tavern, and "kick in" (Todd) and "slip in" (Jake) the occasional original song. Though neither directly attributed this musical choice to the logic of the performance venue, considered within the context of the entire interview it is conceivable that neither considered the tavern to be a site for the performance of many original songs.

It can be suggested then the musicians are **aware** of original-music opportunities in the club scene, but purposively and intentionally make the decision not to pursue these venues. Perhaps by distinguishing cover- from original-music venues, the salience of the distinction between the cover- and original-music ventures is enhanced; conceiving some taverns as venues for the performance of predominantly cover songs may facilitate the interpretation of the original-music venture as distinct from the cover-tavern gig.

This suggestion is also supported by the passages in which some of the musicians articulated the temporal nature of the

tavern gig; though they may not continue to perform in the cover-tavern indefinitely, the "artistic" quality of original-music composition and performance is understood as something that will remain with the musicians. Jake, for example, understood the present as a time for consenting to the sonic limits of the tavern performance, and envisioned the future as a time for pursuing original-music ventures:

> There's bands that say no, we do originals and that's it, we've got a deal, we've got a record deal or we've got a distribution deal, and one day what B-- will be, is just an original band... there's got to be a point where you say no more. I'm not doing other people's material. I refuse, I'm going to be an original band, I'm going to play my own stuff, and I'm going to stick to my guns, good bad or otherwise, we'll sink or swim. If we sink, well we'll fucking sink. We'll do another album and then maybe we'll swim. Or we'll just give up the business and do something else (Jake).

This future-oriented interpretive framework, used to make sense of the current situation, may enhance the salience of the creative endeavour, despite current adherence to tavern-performance conventions. Jake, in effect, creates a symbolic distance between where he is now, and where he would rather, and hopes one day, to be.

Thus, it is conceivable that the musicians are aware of the sonic conventions of the tavern performance, and despite these limits, choose, at least for the time being, to continue to pursue cover-gigs. Adding to the salience of the distinction between cover- and original-music pursuits are evaluative typifications of the type of musician who plays in the cover tavern and that which does not. Rob, for example, drew a distinction between being an "artist" and a "rock pig". A rock pig is a musician who plays covers, conforming to the demands the tavern:

> ...I think I want to get out of this bullshit. I don't think I'll ever be able to stop writing songs. And I'll certainly never be able to stop writing. I'll always be an artist. But I don't know how much longer I'm interested in being a rock pig...But how can you stop writing? You can't (Rob).

Another distinction drawn by the musicians is that between the musician as "artist" and as "entertainer". According to Jake, a musician "should be an artist at the same time" as being an "entertainer". Here, an "entertainer" refers to a musician who adheres to the conventions of the tavern performance (playing cover songs). When asked if he considers himself to be an artist or an entertainer, Peter replied:

> I think there's a real fine line between the two. I think I'm an artist first, when you listen to the

> album I'm an artist. And I'm an entertainer. When you come to see our live show, that's where the theatrical part comes in. You've got to give a good show. And when you put the disk on, you have to give a good listen. So I think the two go pretty much hand in hand.

When performing in the tavern, Peter considers himself an entertainer, and when pursuing his original music, he considers himself to be an artist. Jake also distinguished between himself as a "juke box" and his band as "original". When asked whether he considers himself to be an artist or an entertainer, he replied:

> Well, being a juke box, like I think we were talking about the cover stuff, all we are is like a juke box. I'm picking the songs, and I'm trying to pick them in a good order, trying to keep them entertained, dance, dance you know this and that. Like the day has come where I'm pretty much done with that. Now that the CD's out, I don't, there's got to be a distinction with B-- that it's going to become a strictly original band (Jake)[42].

The "rock pig", "entertainer" and "juke box" typifications, in contrast to those of "artist", may be interpreted as distinctions which enable musicians to continue to pursue tavern gigs, to be "rock pigs" and "entertainers", while reserving an almost sacred place for the original-music endeavour. It seems plausible to suggest that by keeping the two endeavours symbolically distinct, the musicians are able to submit to the sonic conventions of the cover-tavern without compromising the ideals of original creativity[43].

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[42]It should be noted that Jake did not distinguish between himself as "artist" and "entertainer". Rather, he understood any live musical show, be it original or cover music, to be "entertainment". However, this observation does not detract from the salience of his distinction between the musician as artist and as "juke box".

[43]Of the musicians interviewed, Les was the only one to interpret the distinction between "artist" and "entertainer" as a conflated designation, though his account is somewhat confusing. When asked whether he distinguishes between the two labels, he replied:

> Um, I think artist is a too loosely used term. I don't think about it that much. I do what I do because I enjoy what I do. I don't categorize it as an artist or an entertainer. I mean yeah when I'm playing that's the job description right there. The artist part and the entertainer part are two completely different things. An artist paints. A

While this interpretation may enable an understanding of how musicians manage the contradiction between the tavern and original-music practices, it may also be suggested that their interpretive accounts might have the unintended consequence of contributing to the perpetuation of the constraining features of the tavern structure. Some of the musicians viewed the tavern as "naturally" not a place to practice and exhibit artistic autonomy. Rob, for example, understood that musicians are required to perform cover songs in the tavern, and that this is a strategy intended to increase liquor sales. He articulated a certain distaste for those musicians who oppose this strategy; in reference to it he stated that "a bunch of flaky assholes would interpret that as blatant commercialism" and concluded that in fact "[i]t's blatant reality". Also, recall that Les took for granted that "[n]obody comes to clubs like this to hear original songs". It can be suggested that the musicians may not interpret the original-music composition and performance as a priority when playing tavern gigs, and in turn argued that this interpretation serves to naturalize the structure of the tavern, inhibiting critical evaluation and the posing of significant challenges to that structure.

Not only did some musicians tend to naturalize the sonic convention of performing mostly cover songs in the tavern, but Jake, Rob and Les also articulated a certain pleasure taken in the cover-tavern performance. Jake and Peter further took pride in their ability to endure the demands of the tavern performance, and Rob and Jake displayed some resignation to the logics of the tavern gig. I will return to these points below.

I have illustrated a number of strategies through which musicians pursue sonic autonomy and interpret their structural position. These include: a) definitions of self as original, recording musicians through distinctions from known and anonymous "other" non-recording "cover" bands, and strategies of condescension; and b) drawing distinctions between cover and original practices and locating each in temporal frameworks. Musicians also interpret the sonic code in such ways that enable the relevance of originality. Relevance includes positive feelings from spontaneous originality, positive audience reaction to the occasional original song,

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> musician plays music. There's artists and then there's musicians, and the two are not the same thing at all. Art is art and music is music. You're either a musician or you're just somebody who talks the big talk. A guy that I work with is like that. He says 'I'm a jazz <u>artist</u>'. Well yeah, and I'm a <u>vocalist</u>, you know like big deal, fancy words don't mean anything (Les).

and recognition for originality within the tavern structure. The following discussion is motivated in part by Weinstein's comment that by balancing the demands of "backstage" and "frontstage" the musician is never an "artist". I want to show that the musicians do indeed realize a sense of accomplishment as an artist even when front- or on-stage. I suggest that this is accomplished through the relevance of difference; in short, musicians understand all cover bands to play the same songs, as we have seen through the "juke box" metaphor. When musicians are able, in their performance, to add a spontaneous, original change to a cover song and play the occasional original song they reaffirm their self-interpretation as original, creative artists.

### 3.3. Symbolic relevance of original-music practices

To understand the relevance of the composition and performance of original music simply as a means to an end, the end being the record deal, is to deny the symbolic relevance of originality; if we follow this "means-ends" logic, we would have to understand the tavern gig as simply a constraining structure, inhibiting the musicians' original-music pursuits through requisites of conformity to sonic codes, or the performance of cover songs. But if we consider originality as enabling symbolic gratification, rather than simply a potential recording contract, we are able to understand more fully why the musicians might continue to perform in the tavern, despite its constraining structure. In what follows I seek to elucidate from the musicians' narratives illustrations of the symbolic relevance of originality acquired **within** the structure of the tavern performance.

Rob offers a particularly vivid glimpse of the symbolic relevance of original expression, one quite removed from the "recording-contract end":

> You see groove, that's a real important thing in bands. That's really where you squeeze the juice, the real element, the real magical, essential, ju-ju element, that makes you feel soooo good. And it's almost like a drug. It's like a highly addictive substance. It is magic. When you get a bunch of people playing together, and you're really fucking playing together and there's a groove happening, it's magic...And if you get a groove happening on stage where you're just playing, in complete concert, it's like you're flying. It's like you're part of some sort of hypnotic, mystic, weird, overpowering ju-ju. So um, that's really,

that's cool[44].

While the majority of songs performed in the tavern are covers, musicians usually play one or two original songs. This performance and the ensuing audience response (when positive) are symbolically relevant to the musician. To facilitate a positive response from the audience, musicians introduce the original song specifically as one of their own:

> This is one of ours. Check this fucker! (Jake).

Not only do they draw attention to their music by announcing it as original, they are also heard (re-)articulating a perceived desire by the audience for their original music:

> The last two songs were just originals. But since you just requested another original, we happen to have a lot of them (Jake).
>
> Anyway you want original stuff this is an original song. This is a song about good loving gone bad...Ok here we go! Here's one of our own off our CD...(Rob).

Jake perceives a qualitative difference between the audience reaction to an original song and their reaction to a cover song. When playing a cover song that "...all the other tavern bands can play, have played and will continue to play", and when the audience gets "involved" in the song (ie. singing along), Jake is pleased because "...they think we're doing a good job". However,

> ...it's no different from the last five bands that played here the last five weeks...or anywhere. (...it's important to be different?) Sure. That's what being an artist is. You know to paint the picture that everyone else has already painted, the Mona Lisa's already been painted once, you don't want to repaint that. But being an artist, you have to paint a different picture for people. You have to do something different. That's important to me, that's important to the other guys (Jake).

Being recognized as an original artist by playing even one or two original songs during the tavern performance can be conceived as significant not only because it can bring audience approval, but because this practice enables the musicians to draw an important distinction between their own

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[44]I asked Rob if a band can get a 'groove' playing cover songs. He explained that the band just starting out might be able to get a groove, when for example they play a cover song for the first time and it really 'works'. However he explained it as a 'relative groove'; for the novice, that might be satisfying. But for his band, the best 'groove' comes from the original material, or, when playing a cover song on stage, the band 'improvises' by adding spontaneous original changes.

band and others on the basis of originality. Thus, while originality is necessary for upward mobility in terms of recording, the "difference" realized through originality is intrinsically and symbolically rewarding, and can be realized within the logics of the tavern-performance sonic code.

If the performance of original music is symbolically rewarding rather than simply a means to a material (recording) end, one might expect the musicians to pursue gigs in venues where they can perform more than the occasional original song. However, musicians also find symbolic relevance in the performance of cover songs[45]. Interviews revealed an apparent contradiction concerning the performance of covers; on the one hand, musicians devalue the performance of covers on the grounds that this practice is the equivalent of being a "human juke box"; yet the performance of cover songs is concurrently interpreted as symbolically relevant.

"Juke box" is a metaphor which signifies a certain absence of human involvement, implying that any musician can perform the music; further, there is no distinction between one time a song is played and the next. As mentioned, it is important to the musicians that they be different from other bands which play in the tavern, and being a "juke box" certainly does not signal distinction. When the musicians use this metaphor, they omit certain crucial aspects of the tavern practices, which, once elucidated, are revealed to bring satisfaction. In short, to use the metaphor as the musicians do is to exclude the symbolic relevance of playing cover songs in the tavern.

In what follows I discuss the symbolic relevance of the cover-song performance. I present the musicians' interpretations of this relevance, and then offer a re-interpretation, understanding the relevance in terms of strategies of symbolic valuation typically pursued by those in subordinate and intermediate structural positions.

### 3.4. Symbolic relevance of cover-music practices

The symbolic relevance of the cover song performance takes a number of forms, including: a) the enjoyment of performing, be it cover or original songs; b) the sense of ownership playing cover songs brings, despite the fact that the songs were written and popularized by other bands; and c) the diversity enabled by the performance of cover songs.

It may be argued that musicians consent to playing cover

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[45]And, it should be recalled that musicians choose to play the cover tavern because it offers higher wages than does the original-music tavern.

material because this practice enables the act of performing, regardless of the sonic content of the performance. As Jake tells us,

> I like to perform so I don't mind doing the cover stuffbecause I love to get up and do it.

Even when he played strictly cover songs in a Vancouver pub, Jake said "some of it was fun"; he found it rewarding, for example, to modify a hard rock Metallica song (Enter Sandman) for a lounge audience. Rob does not mind playing cover songs, but said:

> As far as cover stuff, I never, ever do anything that um, just for the sake of it being top forty. It's just you know, it's not part of our act, or the band or the whole thing or the feel or whatever about it, you know? It's just uh, it's got to be stuff that I like. And other wise forget it.

Then, during a later discussion of booking agents he said:

> I try to avoid booking agents. But this thing is that they're impossible to avoid. Booking agents are pimps, you know? I mean we're like the whores, and the agents are the pimps. But the analogy to pimps, pimp to agent, is way more direct than the analogy of bands to prostitutes. I mean cause we're just really **having fun and playing** (Rob).

Comparing different cover taverns, Les said:

> (Do you play at the C----?) Yeah we do. We play a lot of crap, stuff that we don't like playing necessarily. Here we get to do like Spin Doctors and Funk stuff and stuff we really like playing and there we get stuck playing Judas Priest and AC/DC. Redundant 80s crap that's had it's day.

Though Les does not enjoy every cover performance, playing music he likes can enhance the pleasure he takes in the cover-song performance. Not only is that performance potentially enjoyable, but it can also enable a sense of ownership of the music:

> (Why is it important to you that the audience has a good time?) From our point of view it's just because, well, that's sort of an easy one. If you were standing up there, you'd want the crowd to respond. You wouldn't want them all to turn away and leave on you, you wouldn't want them not dancing. We've got to get a fair share of people dancing, as well as clapping and cheering, otherwise you feel you're not doing your job, they're not responding to your music (Jake)[46].

Jake refers to playing the cover song as playing "your music", and in doing so, claims ownership by virtue of performing it.

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[46]This narrative was constructed in the context of a discussion of cover songs.

It may be suggested that a sense of ownership contributes to a positive interpretation of the cover-performance. Consent to playing covers is further revealed as the musicians take pleasure in the diversity of material that this practice enables. In the words of Rob, "I...have no problem playing cover material. Because like, you get a chance to sing something else". There are then certain positive characteristics of the live musical performance, regardless of sonic content.

By articulating the symbolic relevance of the performance of cover songs I wish to suggest that the musicians pursue strategies of symbolic valuation typically employed by those in subordinate and intermediate positions. Specifically, they positively value those goods (cover songs) which are within their reach (strategy of moderation) and which facilitate their objectives (strategy of practicality). The logic of the tavern-performance sets limits to the number of original songs they can play, and thus the performance of cover songs, being more practical than pursuing original expression and risking lower liquor sales, is valued.

Further, both Jake and Peter interpreted their success in obtaining tavern gigs as a valued accomplishment:

> Like I said there's so many things, so many aspects that get in your way. So you've got to clear the way, get a far term goal, a goal that can build you to that end result, right? And sometimes along the way something goes wrong. Like I say, all the little things, a guy gets sick of the road or gets sick of trying, gives up. Or I've played with lots of guys who have day jobs now, some guy's shovelling shit somewhere, driving a truck or working in a music store somewhere, one guy's just a dad, one guy's going back to school, one guy works in a glass company you know they go on to do something else because they feel music's not right for them or they can't, it's a long hard road and they can't deal with it (Jake).

Although Jake does not explicitly say that he, on the other hand, can deal with it, he shows that he can by virtue of pursuing tavern gigs. Peter also considers the tavern-gig "route" to be challenging, but says that, like himself:

> if you persevere, I think you're going to get it back...But I think a lot of people get frustrated early in the beginning, and justifiably so. It's a tough, tough thing to get into and succeed in.

Rob illustrates another strategy of symbolic valuation characteristic of subordinate position holders:

> I...have no problem playing cover material. Because like, you get a chance to sing something else.

> What's wrong with that? That's fine. I really really have no patience for every bone head who is so self-righteously indulgent in what they perceive to be the holy nature of their work, that they don't play covers, no time for these petty little commercial considerations. I just don't see it that way. I mean like what's the fucking problem? (Rob).

Not only does Rob consent to the "inevitable" requirement of the performance of cover songs, but he articulates this consent through a distinction between himself, the "conformer" and those anonymous others who do not as readily consent. Returning again to Thompson's link between structural position and strategies of symbolic valuation, we can see how in this case Rob is situated as "subordinate", using the strategy of "respectful resignation". He accepts "the way it is", and criticizes those others who do not consent to the inevitable structure. Jake is also resigned to the requirements of the tavern performance:

> I mean I played Roxy Roller more times that Nick Guilder played Roxy Roller you know because he quit, he retired. And you know, I'm, I'm numb, when I look back at the drummer and call out Roxy Roller and we play it, we just play it. It's like pressing a button on a juke box, we just play it. And I don't even hate it any more. I hated it five years ago. And now I just play it, and I enjoy it now, before I hated it. It's to the point where it's a break in the show, it makes people dance, it gets people dancing so now I've learned to enjoy it because it helps me to get them on the dance floor.

The preceding discussions have been concerned to show how tavern musicians interpret structural constraints of the tavern performance with respect to sonic boundaries. Sonic conventions do, however, transcend the logics of the tavern gig; even as they compose their original music, musicians are faced with certain "codes of the genre" and limits articulated by the logics of the recording industry.

### 3.5. Sonic creativity and the logics of original-music composition

Despite their short histories, genres of popular music have "boundaries" which pose limits to sonic autonomy. In what follows I explore these conventions and limitations, and illustrate the interpretive frameworks employed by musicians to make sense of them. I look specifically at how the musicians appropriate and integrate the sonic codes. It is revealed that they do not adhere to the codes of the popular commercial music industry simply because the structure of the industry impels them to; although certain sonic codes are reproduced by the practices of those within the recording

industry, they are not always explicitly acknowledged by the tavern musicians. Rather, the musicians a) deny following sonic codes in the creation of their original music; and b) draw distinctions between themselves and those others whom they interpret to follow the codes. At the same time, I suggest that musicians are compelled to construct their original music within limits set by the genre; should they deviate too far, their music would not likely be considered marketable by major record labels. I then reinterpret the musicians' accounts as being in fact part of the sonic code; there is within the sonic code an implicit code of "authenticity". In short, I argue that the musicians follow the code by virtue of denying it.

In order to secure a record deal musicians must produce original material that is both similar to and distinct from popular commercial music (Weinstein, 1991: 22; 78). Record companies demand a sound not too radically different from that which has already proven profitable on the market, but distinct enough from other recordings to offer consumers something new. Tavern musicians, however, offer an alternative interpretation of the demands of the recording industry. While acknowledging in the abstract that certain codes must be followed, and while perceiving other bands to follow these codes, the tavern musicians deny that they themselves simulate the music of popular recording artists:

> ...ok someone's got Seattle right? Well instantly well there's Pearl Jam ok and then there's Stone Temple Pilots, can you tell the difference?... Well the Stone Temple Pilots, they sound exactly like Pearl Jam. There's a whole Seattle thing. And now record companies go "oh anything that sounds like Seattle, gotta have it gotta have it". And then right away you've got like I Mother Earth popping up from Toronto that sound like Sound Guard, and then you've got the third string warmed over Liquid Bone Dance thing from Winnipeg that was being courted around by record labels because they sort of sound like I Mother Earth, which sounds like the Seattle-ly kind of thing. And so it's all just so trendy, it doesn't have any basis whatsoever. I mean it's, whatever. It's popular music, you know? (Do you gear your music toward those kinds of sounds?) No. I think that if you want to do anything you have to stick to your guns. You have to stick to your guns (Rob).

Rob acknowledges that original musicians are required to simulate the sound of recording artists, but interprets his own sonic practices by claiming to "stick to his guns". He understands that in order to be successful, he is required to break with the sonic conventions of the industry. Another strategy pursued in the negotiation of sonic autonomy,

revealed in the passage above, is the denouncement of the musicians who succeed by virtue of simulating the sound of already-popular bands. Rob attributes their success to adhering to the formula proven to work, and prides himself on not "giving in" to the "trendiness" of the industry. In this way Rob situates himself as "dominant", drawing distinctions between himself and those others, and employing the strategy of condescension. However, Rob's narrative might also be interpreted as articulating the strategy of "rejection" typical of those in subordinate positions: he rejects the products of recording acts on the basis that they lack originality, and in doing so implicitly reconfirms his own products as being inferior.

Jake also considers his original music to be distinct from that of other bands; though he does not explicitly deny following sonic codes, as Rob does, Jake states that:

> the Mona Lisa's already been painted once, you don't want to repaint that...being an artist, you have to paint a different picture for people.

The crucial point here is that the focus of Jake's talk is not on ways in which his original music simulates that of other recording artists, but rather it is on the perceived **difference**.

Peter demarcates the originality of his music on the basis of what he calls its "spirituality". He perceives most original music of other bands to sound like "bashing somebody over the head"; his music, on the other hand, "is into having hidden messages"; "...the music is, none of it's about boy meets girl...we kind of stay away from that" (Peter). His music is original, he says, because it takes up environmental debates and issues of criminal justice. Like Jake, Peter does not deny following sonic codes, but rather interprets his original music as departing from the standard "boy meets girl" formula, perceived as typical of current popular songs. Finally, Peter articulates a sense of authenticity when he states "we're real people and we write real songs".

Although the musicians denied, either explicitly or implicitly, that their music simulates that of popular recording artists, there is evidence to suggest that their music is at least in part similar to the latter. Perhaps offering the most vivid evidence for this is the fact that, as discussed above, several musicians, when asked to define their music, did so through reference to popular recording artists. They tried, in other words, to give me a feel for their music by drawing on an (assumed) shared knowledge of well-known artists. Clearly, if their music was as distinct from these other artists as their accounts seem to want to indicate, such a comparison would have been misleading and probably not used.

### 3.5.1. The ideology of authenticity

In Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology (1991), Deena Weinstein writes that an "ideology of authenticity" is part of the sonic code of heavy metal. In short, bands typically claim to be authentic, denying that their music simulates the sound of other bands. Evidence for the ideology of authenticity was also found in the present study. By claiming to be sonically authentic, the musicians, it can be argued, inadvertently adhere to the sonic code. While the code of the genre sets limits to the construction of original music, within that structure there is room for the unique combination of sonic elements. The result is the production of original music which is distinct from that produced by other musicians, yet still falling within the boundaries of the genre. Such diversity, enabled by the sonic structure, permits the interpretation of one's music as "authentic".

I have discussed the musician's interpretations of the sonic structure of both the tavern performance and original-music pursuits, and have offered some plausible re-interpretations to illustrate ways in which that structure both enables and constrains the creative practices of the musicians. In what follows I discuss a second dimension of the performance code: the visual code. In doing so I wish to illustrate again ways in which the musicians a) interpret the visual code and b) are potentially both enabled and constrained by that code.

## 4. The visual dimension

> Heavy metal is inhospitable, if not hostile, to performers whose looks do not conform to its code of appearance (Weinstein, 1991: 64).

In this section I first discuss evidence in the literature for the existence of a visual code in popular music, referred to in this analysis as style of dress and hair, and then turn to consider the musicians' interpretations of this code. Of particular interest are the musicians' denial of their own adherence to a visual code, their interpretations of those who do follow the code as "poseurs", and their criticisms of the latter. Musicians were also found to acknowledge conforming to a visual code in certain contexts, particularly when adherence is functional for their performance. In the third part of this section I take up an apparent contradiction: first, I show through a descriptive and comparative content analysis that tavern musicians do in fact adhere to a visual code; their visual image is similar to that of other tavern musicians and popular recording artists. Then I consider the contradiction between the findings of the content analysis and the musicians' claims to visual authenticity. To understand this contradiction I return to the notion of an "ideology of

authenticity", to suggest that claims to visual authenticity, together with the expurgation of those others who "conform" to the visual code, are strategies with which musicians interpret the visual structure of the performance code.

## 4.1. Visual codes

Visual image is central to popular music culture. The majority of the lay-out of the fan magazine, for example, is devoted to pictures of musicians in "full dress", with only a small portion devoted to written text. The visual appearance of the rock musician is by no means arbitrary. A visual code, either implicitly or explicitly understood by the players in rock, is adhered to, and severe deviations are not tolerated.

Musicians acknowledge the existence and salience of a dress code within the industry. For instance, during our interview I began to ask Jake about his visual appearance, but was interrupted when his friend approached our table. I began by saying "I see you have long hair and you wear this jewellery"; I was cut off at this point, and when our discussion resumed it was initiated by Jake: "You asked me about the glam thing and the dress code and stuff, right?". I did not, however, use these terms which suggests a particular conceptual framework with which Jake makes sense of the visual appearance of musicians. He later described the strategic construction of the visual appearance of popular recording artists:

> Look at the cover of Pearl Jam Ten, and they all look like that. They're all trendy, they're all wearing Doc Marten boots, they're wearing plaid shirts and hats and all these things and ripped jeans and they look like they just got off the street and this is the new trend. Look closely at that picture and everyone of them has been **dressed** by somebody you know, they're all a little bit different from the other guy, you know what I mean? There's no mustard stains on his jeans or anything like that. I mean these guys, they're a product of planning, serious planning. "Ok this band's good they're going to sell records, they're strong they got some good songs, now let's market this band. We've got to make them look a certain way" (Jake).

Musicians are not only aware of a visual code but they use the term "poseur" to identify and define those (known and anonymous) others whom they consider to adhere to this code. All were familiar with the term "poseur", and Les had this to say about these musicians:

> (Have you heard the term 'poseurs'?) Yup. Lots of times. (What does that mean?) Um, I guess guys with long hair that don't play very well (laughs). No, see to me what a poseur is is a guy who doesn't play anything, who dresses like he's Robby Rock

> God, who looks like Ricky Rockets from Poison or something. And he walks down the mall I guess that's what a poseur would be.

Todd also used the term:

> A lot of people try to fit that image, the poseur glam kind of stuff. There's people who want to look a certain way.

Despite their awareness of the code, all of the musicians interviewed denied following the dress code themselves. Jake, for instance, first gave an account of how his current image differs from one displayed in the past:

> The dress thing yeah well we dress the way we feel like dressing. Five years ago you had to dress like you were coming out of a rock magazine. You still do, but you dress a little calmer now. Like you don't put ten tons of hair-spray in your hair, you don't put spandex on and shit. I haven't worn spandex I can show you pictures where we're all wearing spandex.

Shortly thereafter, however, Jake stressed the "authenticity" of his appearance, claiming that "I feel dress the way you dress, feel the way you feel". Rob also acknowledged the influence of the visual codes on his previous attire:

> I've gone through a lot of different kinds of phases, like I used to wear make-up and stuff and I used to have huge hair, all different kinds of colors or whatever,

but explains that now his visual choices are made on the basis of "comfort":

> But I just typically, where's there's the process of, let's face it, aging, you just can't, like, what I'm doing is what I feel most comfortable with. And what I feel most comfortable with right now is just a really basic, striped down street deal. That's how I handle it. Meanwhile the guitar player has pink dreadlocks. And that's great, but that's not my schtik (Rob).

Asked about his long hair, Todd replied:

> (I notice that you have long hair, but do you try to simulate the recording artists?) No, I've just had long hair for years, and then became a musician. I don't know how it happens.

And in reference to pictures of musicians in heavy metal fan magazines, he said "We're not into that kind of theatrics at all". Asked whether he considers his visual appearance to be influenced by commercial recording artists, Rob replied "No. Not even close". In reference to poseurs, Les stated that:

> I don't buy into any of that crap. There's grunge poseurs and all that crap. It's a trend and people are going to follow trends if they see their favourite band and that's the way they're dressed.

Adherence to a dress code is, however, considered by Jake and Rob to be legitimate to the extent that it is functional for the tavern performance. Specifically, it is important that the band look different from the audience, and distinction as such is facilitated by their dress. In the words of Jake,

> I wish the guys in the band would dress up a little bit more, because you know you're walking around and people see you, you could be just another bum drunk slug and if a bar fight broke out, the bouncer would throw you out of the bar because you look like everybody else. It shouldn't be like that. Here you are on stage, people come down because they want to see a show, they want to see something different. They don't want to see somebody out of the crowd, you know like that's fun to see but when they pay money and they're drinking they want to see a performance, you know? They see rock videos, day after day and these people are all dressed a certain way.

Similarly, Rob stated that:

> You dress up a little bit, you want to look a little different from the rest of the crowd...

Thus, the musicians acknowledge a dress code, give it legitimacy in certain contexts, but at the same time denounce those who follow the code, claiming that their own look is one that is "natural" or "real". A contradiction between the musicians' accounts, in which they deny adhering to visual codes, and their observed visual appearance is revealed through a descriptive and comparative content analysis[47].

## 4.2. Procedures of content analysis

Prior to the formal analysis, photographs from one fan magazine were studied, and every relevant aspect of the visual image was recorded (Ball & Smith, 1992: 23). From this, a number of descriptive categories were developed, including: hair (length, color, bangs, style); facial and body hair; race; body type; dress (jacket, blazer, shirt, pants, shoes,

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[47]Though I obtained photographs of all the musicians interviewed, only three were suitable for, and thus included in, the analysis (those of Jake, Rob and Les); the photos of Peter and Todd did not include their bodies. Their dress however was described in detail in field notes, made after my observations of their performances, and was found to be similar to that of Jake, Rob and Les; though there were variations, their dress did not deviate from the categories outlined in Appendix 4. The content analysis is based in part then on photographs of musicians other than those who were interviewed. All did however perform in the tavern, and are thought to be representative of tavern musicians.

gloves, headband, hat, scarf, vets, tie); jewellery (necklace, ring, bracelet, earrings); "other" (glasses, sunglasses, ear plugs, wrist band, tape on fingers, tattoos); props; shot location; poses/postures; and facial expression. Rules for coding were made explicit, including the criteria and definitions of certain content, such as defining exactly the length of hair that qualified as "short", "shoulder-length", or "long". Once categories and rules were constructed, photograph contents were identified, coded, and counted for frequency. The same content analysis form (see Appendix 4) was used in the analysis of both kinds of photograph.

4.3. Findings of the content analysis

The content analysis suggests that there is a dress code for rock. The hair length, color and style of tavern musicians was found to be very similar to that of commercial musicians. For both groups, the most common length was to upper-chest, followed by hair to mid-chest; black was the most common hair color, followed by brown, and more musicians in each group had curly hair, though nearly as many in each had straight hair[48].

For both tavern and commercial musicians, mustaches, sideburns and facial-hair stubble were rare, but were present with equal frequency among each group. Goatees were, however, less common among tavern than commercial musicians.

Musicians were typically of either slim or medium build. Only one tavern and three commercial musicians were judged to be of large build. Of both groups, more were of medium than of slim build.

Fewer tavern musicians wore jackets than did commercial musicians. Of those jackets worn, the most popular color for both groups was black. The jackets worn by tavern musicians were more often of leather material. About the same percentage in each group wore denim jackets and blazers, though blazers were far less common than denim or leather jackets.

Nearly all musicians of both types wore a shirt; of those wearing a shirt just under half of commercial and tavern musicians wore a t-shirt. Black was the most common color. The same percentage wore shirts partially open and less than half wore their shirts loose rather than tucked in.

About the same percentage of commercial and tavern musicians wore jeans. Fewer commercial musicians wore shorts than did tavern musicians. Of those whose footwear was visible, the

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[48]I refer the reader to Appendix 5 for frequencies.

majority of commercial and tavern musicians wore boots; western boots were most common, followed by Army boots.

Musicians wore necklaces, rings, bracelets and earrings. About half of each group wore at least one necklace; over half of those wearing necklaces wore only one. Pendants on necklaces were more commonly worn by commercial musicians than by tavern musicians. The most popular pendant for those in both groups was a cross. Of those whose fingers were visible, commercial musicians wore more rings than did tavern musicians; fewer wore earrings, and the same percent wore bracelets.

Finally, it was rare for musicians to be photographed laughing or smiling. Perhaps trying to appear nonchalant, intrepid or to convey the image that they are serious about their music and are thus to be taken seriously, both commercial and tavern musicians wore flat, expressionless faces, some gazing off to the distance, some staring at the camera in dreamy allure or steadfast glare.

While the content analysis revealed similarities between the visual appearance of tavern and commercial musicians, the frequencies of each item of dress and jewellery were relatively low. For instance, while about fifty-percent of both tavern and commercial musicians wore jeans or t-shirts, fifty-percent were wearing pants other than jeans and shirts other than t-shirts. This is an important point, as it indicates the diversity enabled by the visual code. The variety in style of dress, revealed by the content analysis, suggests that unique combinations are permitted by the code, and that musicians are able to construct an image somewhat distinct from others.

However, the analysis also reveals boundaries of the code which pose significant limits to the visual possibilities. Recall that the items sought in the content analysis (Appendix 4) were identified first by an initial analysis of rock magazines. In order to identify the boundaries of the visual code, one need only look at what is absent from this column; none of the musicians, for example, wore the matching suits and cropped, tidy hair styles of the early Beatles. The "preppie" look of the late 1970s and early 1980s, featuring tweeds, blazers, madras check shirts, chino pants and Shetland sweaters (Lurie, 1983) is also outside the boundaries of the 90s code for rock.

Thus, like a language, the code of visual appearance enables diversity and certain unique combinations of image, but at the same time poses significant limits to those possibilities. The logics of the code are not necessarily conceived or articulated by the musicians themselves; unless functional for their performance, all denied following a dress code; the

musicians stated rather that their visual image is unique, "real" or "authentic". How is the contradiction between the interpretations given by musicians, and the discovery of a visual code to be interpreted? One possibility is to understand the contradiction within the context of the "code of authenticity". The visual code enables the combination of elements for the construction of a relatively unique style of self-presentation. By claiming that their image is unique, the musicians make sense of their appearance by exercising the potential for difference and diversity inherent in the code. But the musicians are not completely free to choose their style; while the code permits them to retain a sense of authenticity, it does, at the same time, clearly pose limits to their visual appearance.

A final dimension of the performance code concerns conventions of stage talk. The verbal dimension is discussed below, and the chapter concludes with a summary of the issues of central concern to this discussion.

5. The verbal dimension

In discussing the verbal dimension, I present the musicians' interpretations of the verbal code as well as excerpts of stage talk, tape recorded during my visits to the tavern, which suggest that musicians do follow certain verbal conventions. Once again the musicians are found to a) deny conforming to the verbal code; and b) pursue strategies of distinction, derision and condescension in the process of symbolic valuation.

5.1. Interpretations of verbal practices

During tavern observations I frequently heard musicians announce drink specials over the microphone[49]. Asked to reflect on this practice, the musicians responded as follows:

> #1: (Some bands will announce drink specials...) I don't do that. (Are you asked to do that?) Yeah. (Is there a reason why you don't?) I don't think it's ethically correct. I feel I'm not here to be a disk jockey and most clubs have one. I don't drink and I don't condone drinking (Les).
>
> #2: ...music, it's money, it all relates to that. If you don't generate cash for who you're working for, then you're not working for them any more and you're back in the basement again. (Does that have an impact on what you do then?) What, selling

[49]This included those musicians interviewed as well as performers who were not interviewed.

> stuff?. (Yeah, if the bar's concerned about beer sales, and your reputation is based on that, and you want to get booked...) No. I mean what are you going to do? Go run around and make everybody drink? You can't right? They're either going to drink, they're either going to come, or they're not going to come, and when they're there, they're either going to drink or they're not going to drink. All I can do is just be the band (Rob).
>
> #3: (I've heard bands say to the audience "drink up" and "party"...) Yeah but only morons say that kind of shit. That's just shit. But then of course the thing is, let's face it. The average I.Q. is one hundred, you know? That explains a lot (Rob).

Musicians understand that their employment depends in part on their ability to promote liquor consumption; in fact, they earn a reputation in the industry on this basis. In the three passages above, Les and Rob deny that they purposively use their stage talk as a method of promoting liquor sales. Apparently, "being the band" (Rob, passage #2) is a practice quite removed from that of liquor promotion.

However, transcripts of musicians' stage talk do in fact reveal reference to liquor consumption. Les denied promoting liquor consumption in the interview (passage #1 above), but his tape-recorded stage talk reveals reference to his own liquor consumption:

> By the way anyone who was in here last night that I met I'd like to apologise to you now, while I have you all here. I was a bit intoxicated last night. Just a little, not much. I never ever drink so (Les).

Referring to a guitar player in his band, Jake also made reference to alcohol in his stage talk:

> ...he's going to shave his head on stage live for you tonight. How many people want to see a live head-shaving? (cheers) How many people are willing to buy him a shooter, preferably Jack Daniels to make sure he does it?

And Todd was heard during his performance saying:

> I would kill everybody...for a drop of sweet beer.

The stage talk of musicians who performed at the tavern but were not interviewed was also recorded, and the following passages are indicative of the reference to liquor consumption in their talk:

> Lead Singer: Tequila! We're going to be drinking that shit tonight. Got a tune here for ya, for any Leonard Skinnard fans out there. "What's your name little girl."
>
> Lead Singer: Yeah thank you. Having a field day

> alright. The more fucking you guys drink, the more tequila you guys drink, the bigger the field gets.

These references to alcohol may be interpreted as saying: "Let's drink together and this will add value to your entertainment dollar". A bond seems to be created through signalling the shared activity of liquor consumption: the audience cheers, signalling approval for the identification of the band as "partyers". It cannot be concluded that what musicians say to the audience has a direct and non-problematic effect on patrons' liquor consumption. The point I wish to make however is that although their employment is contingent in part on adhering to the verbal code of liquor promotion, the musicians deny such practices in their interpretations of verbal practices.

Further, not only do Rob and Les deny their participation in liquor promotion, but they also draw distinctions between themselves and others whom they interpret to follow a verbal code, and devalue those others (condescension) and their stage talk (derision). In passage #3 above, Rob conceives verbal liquor promotion to be a practice of those musicians with low intelligence. And Les, though not stating so explicitly, infers that those who do announce drink specials are, like the practice of doing so, ethically incorrect.

6. Chapter summary

In Chapter Four I presented the musicians as actors struggling to secure the resources necessary in the pursuit of original-music endeavours. This conception enabled the musicians to be understood as occupying a subordinate structural position, constrained in their realization of artistic creativity. I then departed from this structural reading to present in Chapter Five the musicians' interpretations of three symbolic codes: the sonic, visual and the verbal. Throughout the discussion I illustrated strategies of symbolic valuation typical not only of subordinate groups, but also those typical of intermediate and dominant groups. This suggested that, despite restricted access to resources and despite performance conventions, tavern musicians employ common-sense interpretive strategies which enable them to cope with the contradictions and struggles they encounter. In the following chapter I summarize this research project, raise some criticisms and limitations of this study, and address the issue of change within the music industry; specifically, I raise questions concerning the possibilities for tavern musicians to pose significant challenges to the symbolic structure of the tavern performance. I then discuss Canadian popular music studies in light of these findings, and suggest directions for future research.

# Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusions

## 1. A summary of the research project

In the first chapter I discussed a number of approaches to the study of popular music, beginning with a review of recent literature published on the Canadian recording industry. Though peripheral to the present study, this discussion was meant to illustrate a political-economic approach to the Canadian music industry, concerned with the preservation of cultural nationalism. Appropriating these debates, I argued that research should turn to study the local politics of music production, particularly at a time when the rise of Independent labels and the availability of home-recording equipment enable the localized production of popular music, and thereby decrease dependence on major, multinational record labels. The present study was intended to contribute to this shift in research focus, and was argued to be particularly appropriate given that most Canadian musicians never sign a deal with a major record label.

In this review of approaches to the study of popular music I also discussed briefly the "historic", "interactive" and "critical" perspectives, and argued that each ignore, respectively, issues of reception and appropriation, politics and asymmetrical relations of power, and the aesthetic or symbolic relevance of musical forms and practices. I then reviewed "subculture" and "superstar" perspectives which, respectively, treat the musician as only peripheral to the subculture, and, because only a small portion achieve superstar status, neglect the majority of musicians. I argued that research is needed which takes as the domain of inquiry the lived experiences of Canadian tavern rock musicians, and, appropriating some key assumptions of the approaches reviewed and discarding others, I set forth several premises on which the present study was based.

In Chapter Two I reviewed a number of theoretical models and concepts presupposing cultural studies generally. Based on a critique of high, popular and mass culture research, I: a) rejected distinctions between high and popular culture, and views of culture as imposed from above or determined by vulgar tastes of mass audiences; b) conceived an active, critical agent who employs interpretive strategies to make sense of cultural forms and practices, concurrently enabled and constrained by the logics of cultural worlds; and c) understood culture as symbolic forms and practices, grounded in ideologically- and politically-configured structures.

Informed by Thompson (1990), I challenged the assumptions of theories of cultural transformation; specifically, I rejected the assumptions that a) cultural change is simply the product

of secularization and rationalization; and b) ideology refers simply to secular belief systems. With an understanding of the "mediazation of modern culture" (Thompson, 1990) and with a critical conception of ideology, I drew on theories of social and cultural reproduction as presupposing the present study, but not without first making problematic the naive assumptions of consensus, social cohesion, and class-reductionism. Bourdieu's theory of reproduction was then reviewed, and from it I appropriated the view that a) culture sustains and perpetuates itself; b) social inequality is tolerated and even anticipated; and c) social order is reproduced as given and natural.

I then argued that the model of cultural reproduction opens the door for cultural research at the site of lived experience. With a "structural" conception of culture (Thompson, 1990), understanding cultural forms and practices to be situated in contexts structured by asymmetrical relations of power, I argued that ethnographic research is most able to penetrate the symbolic community or habitus, or the site where structure and action intersect. Participation in the habitus was seen as contributing to its reproduction; at the same time, action was understood to be structurally grounded, limited to the possibilities enabled by the logics of the cultural habitus.

Having established an active, critical subject, both enabled and constrained by these logics, I turned to consider in greater depth the notions of cultural constraint and resistance. To discuss the former, I turned to a critical conception of ideology and Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Ideology was taken to refer to those symbolic constructs which serve to produce and sustain asymmetrical relations of domination, and based on this conception I outlined a number of ideological strategies for the construction of symbolic forms and modes of operation of ideology, both as suggested by Thompson (1990). I drew on Gramsci's notion of hegemony to argue that cultural domination operates, in the absence of coercion and force, through legitimating symbols, active consent to subordination, and ideologically-encoded forms of common sense. Sites for cultural resistance, finally, were argued to take the form of critical appropriation of contingent meanings and the polysemic nature of texts, and I argued that oppositional readings of cultural texts were thus inherent in the texts themselves.

I concluded Chapter Two by introducing a number of research questions, and I discussed the methodological strategy and techniques of the project in Chapter Three. The research questions were informed by the review of the literature and by issues raised by the theoretical debates, the methodological framework, and my previous research of tavern musicians. Using

the depth hermeneutic framework suggested by Thompson (1990), three domains of analysis were identified; these included the internal structure of symbolic forms, the socio-cultural contexts of their production, transmission, and reception and appropriation, and the interpretive frameworks through which subjects actively and critically make sense of symbolic forms.

In chapters Four and Five I discussed the musicians' interpretations as they concerned tavern performances and original-music pursuits, and offered my own re-interpretations as informed by theoretical concepts and my understanding of the socio-cultural contexts and internal structure of the symbolic code of rock.

The musicians interviewed were all pursuing careers as original artists, but at the same time performed cover songs on the tavern circuit. The first part of my analysis (Chapter Four) illustrated the structural position of the musicians, including their limited access to resources and the demands of both the tavern gig and their original-music ventures. The audience-oriented tavern gig was found to both enable and constrain the original-music pursuits; money earned enabled musicians to raise financial capital for original recordings and enabled band-promotion and album-distribution. Moreover, the gig enabled musicians to try to "prove" themselves as resourceful, talented "self-sufficient" musicians, which, they felt, is required in order to attract the interest of major record labels.

One musician identified a contradiction in the logic of the recording industry. While he felt it necessary to establish himself as a safe investment for a major label, he found it difficult to do so without first having access to the resources of the record company. The tavern gig was also found to constrain the opportunities for original-music pursuits. The audience-oriented cover performance drew time, energy and creative resources away from the original-music efforts.

In the second part of my analysis (Chapter Five) I introduced three structural positions (subordinate, intermediate and dominant) and corresponding strategies of symbolic valuation (Thompson, 1990). I suggested: a) that tavern musicians have restricted access to resources and may thus be considered to occupy a subordinate structural position; and b) that by balancing the "frontstage" demands of the audience-oriented tavern performance and the "backstage" demands of practices and relations related to their original-music ventures, musicians are seldom able to realize the artistic, creative dimension of their musical careers.

I then introduced three dimensions of the symbolic code of rock: the sonic, visual and verbal dimensions. It was argued

that while the logics of this code set limits to the possible practices of the musicians, the latter appropriate each dimension of the code, bringing to it interpretations which enable them to sustain creative and original sonic, visual and verbal practices.

2. Limitations of this research and questions for further research

Clearly, tavern musicians must construct performances which adhere to symbolic codes. While the codes allow for differences within, practices outside the boundaries of the codes are not permitted. The sonic, visual and possibly the verbal practices of musicians have changed over the course of the history of the genre. A number of questions are left unanswered in this context. At what level in the industry is change instigated, and by what means? Is it possible for musicians at the tavern level to introduce changes to the code without marginalizing themselves to the point of exclusion from the genre? Or is change always and only introduced at the level of recording musicians, perhaps as an innovative marketing strategy? It would be useful to study these processes, and to look in particular at the instigation and appropriation of changes to the code by tavern musicians.

It is useful to raise some critical comments about this study. First, there is an uneasy tension throughout between the concepts of hegemony, ideology, and power, for example, and the data from the field. Had my intention been to explore or 'test' theory, I would have began with a theoretical framework, identified gaps or problematics, and designed an empirical project with which I could explicitly and systematically seek support for and contradictions to that framework.

On the other hand, had my intention been to explore the substantive area, I would have proceeded with minimal theory, entered the field and described what I found there. Interestingly, my study followed neither design, and as a result have perhaps not done justice to either areas of inquiry. I neither took full advantage of the concepts available to me, with the result of a relatively unsophisticated analysis, nor did I fully describe the field, resulting in a relatively superficial story of the lived experience of tavern musicians.

What I am left with it seems is a simplistic re-interpretation of selected shared accounts, accounts given a new conceptual label. It is less clear however whether those labels facilitate a deeper understanding of the field; similarly, I have engaged some of the theoretical concepts, but have not critically re-evaluated them within the context of the data.

A second and related criticism concerns the boundaries of the project. Though I identified three domains of inquiry in the study of symbolic forms, namely their internal structure, their social contexts, and the interpretations of forms offered by research participants, I proceeded as if I were studying all three, but in fact I did not study the internal structure of every symbolic form relevant to tavern music culture, nor did I explore in adequate detail the social contexts of the tavern musician. On a second conceptual plane I identified as relevant areas of inquiry the production, construction, transmission, and reception and appropriation of symbolic forms, but in fact only studied the latter.

The first criticism can be linked to the problem of demarcating the boundaries, as an exploration of the other domains would facilitate the study of the theoretical concepts. To show that a symbolic form is ideologically encoded, for example, I would need to study its production, transmission and reception. I realize of course that this project needed to be limited in scope, and given that, it would have been useful to define more clearly the boundaries of this project, and perhaps suggest in passing ways in which those other domains could be studied in the context of the tavern music culture.

A third concern is less a criticism than it is a limitation imposed by the method of this research. In Chapter One I situated the unsigned tavern musician in the broader context of the Canadian and international music industry. I suggested that increased availability of home-recording equipment and the rise of Independent record labels decrease the musicians' dependence on multinational record labels. Unanswered by this study are questions concerning the success rate of musicians who pursue the "independent" route; the process by which musicians use Independent albums to attract major record label interest; and the processes and politics involved in signing bands, from the perspective of the record company personnel. Though limited in this study to the narrative accounts of unsigned musicians, a more complete understanding of the industry would require a methodological strategy able to engage questions of this nature.

### 3. Some implications for Canadian popular music studies

It was suggested in Chapter One that research of local level popular musicians is lacking, particularly within a Canadian context. Given the recent concerns for the preservation of regional music cultures, there is some optimism that academics will find the local site of production to be a worthwhile place to focus their efforts. As this study has revealed, local popular musicians, many of whom are pursuing their goals by playing the tavern circuits, struggle to maintain a sense

of artistic creativity within a symbolic structure which permits creativity within boundaries, but which concurrently poses significant limits.

While it is crucial to understand the Canadian music scene within a global context, as the majority of researchers cited in Chapter One have done, this research must be accompanied by studies of the lived experiences of local-level musicians; it is, in part, the sense musicians make of their situation that will determine the future logics of the industry. Embodied in interpretive accounts are strategies which both enable and constrain local musicians in their original-music ventures. Thus it would be useful to continue to seek to elucidate those interpretations, understanding not only the structural configuration of the Canadian music industry, but also the experiences of those who pursue success at the grassroots level.

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## Appendix 1: A note on the sample

When I began the study I was aware of two Edmonton taverns known to hire live rock bands on a weekly basis. Of the two I chose to pursue my research at the tavern closest to my home. It was only after establishing rapport with the tavern manager and gaining permission to conduct my research that I observed a performance and found that the bands hired varied in genre. The first band observed was, for example, a country-rock band, the second was "alternative", and the third was hard rock/heavy metal.

Because my initial interest was in heavy metal musicians, and because this tavern clearly hired musicians of other genres, I was faced with the decision of whether to change research settings by selecting a different tavern, or continue my research at this site and accommodate the variety of bands present.

Because rapport had been established and permission granted, I decided to continue at that site, and either control for the variation by studying a number of different bands, or take advantage of the diversity and pursue questions of difference among genres by creating a typology of genres and interviewing a number of musicians representative of each.

During my second interview with the tavern manager it was revealed that bands differed also with respect to stature. Specifically, bands of three types performed in the tavern: local bands with little or no tavern experience, who played one set a few times a year during a Wednesday night "Amateur Night"; circuit bands who performed primarily cover songs and toured the tavern circuit; and recording bands, who played mostly original music and typically played for one night only.

Thus, bands varied along dimensions of genre and stature. The issue became one of selecting either a homogeneous or heterogeneous sample.

The decision was facilitated by pragmatic interests. First, if I wanted to interview a number of bands I would need to be less selective; the tavern only employed four bands per month[50], and because I was in the field for only three months, there were only twelve bands to chose from. If I had restricted the genre to heavy metal there wou' l have been

---

[50]With the exception of the first month of my study; in celebration of the tavern's Anniversary, twenty bands were hired that month, most of whom were popular recording artists. I decided to begin my field work the following month to avoid interviewing musicians who were perhaps atypical.

fewer bands from which I could request an interview; for example, it was possible that only every third band would be of the metal genre. Thus, in the interest of maximizing the pool of musicians from which I could request an interview, I opted for a heterogeneous sample with respect to genre. Musicians asked to participate played heavy metal, hard rock, and alternative music. The genre did not appear to influence the interview responses, though a study designed to investigate the possible differences could conceivably be conducted.

With respect to stature, I selected a relatively homogeneous sample; that is, I excluded from the study those musicians who were signed and played for one night only, and I excluded also those musicians who performed one set on Amateur Night. While it would have been possible to study these musicians, I was most interested in opportunities for original composition, performance and recording while playing on the tavern circuit. Neither of these types of band played the weekly circuit; further, because recording musicians played primarily original music and the amateurs were known to have less interest in original music, neither were thought to facilitate the research questions. All musicians interviewed then were either currently or had been in the past on the tavern circuit, and all were pursuing original-music ventures while playing cover songs for tavern audiences.

Appendix 2: Interview schedule - tavern musician

1. Musical Content
-what kind of music do you play?
-how do you decide on your set list?
-what might influence the type of or choice of songs you play?
-do you play top 40?
-why do you perform cover songs?
-do you play original music?
-what outlets are available for original music?
-are there any restrictions on what kind of music you play? ie. cover versus original?

2. Visual Self-Presentation
-do you dress in any particular fashion for your performance?
-does your everyday style of dress differ from the stage outfit?
-I've heard the term poseurs. Have you? And if so, what does this term mean to you?

3. Verbal Dimension
-what do you say to the audience while on stage?
-does your band announce drink specials?

4. Tavern Performances
-do you play on a circuit?
-what are some of the reasons you play in clubs?
-why are you playing in this particular club?
-why do you think you were hired here?
-what do you think the hiring criteria are?
-what might make the manager want to hire you back again?

5. Agents
-tell me a little about agents
-how much say does a band have in the contract with the tavern?
-who agrees on the price?
-who supplies the equipment?
-what kind of restrictions are placed on conduct?

6. Goals
-how would you describe 'success'?
-what is the purpose of playing in bars?
-have you made any records?
-what's your goal, your dream?
-what does "being successful" mean to you?
-how do you achieve this?
-do you consider yourselves artists or entertainers?
-what is your primary source of income?
-do you hold other full or part-time employment?
-do you have any formal training?

Appendix 3a: Research participant consent form - tavern musician

I, _____,
have been informed of the nature and purpose of this study. Specifically, I understand that the purpose of the study is to gain a fuller understanding of how the local rock music industry works, from the perspectives of amateur musicians, booking agents, and tavern managers, and that the study is being conducted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

I acknowledge my right to withdraw my consent to participate in this study at any time, without consequence.

I have been informed that my right to privacy will be respected, and that I may decline from disclosing information at my discretion without consequence. Further, I understand that anonymity will be granted through the use of pseudonyms in any written documents and reports, published or unpublished. Finally, I recognize that information disclosed will be regarded as confidential, and will not be disclosed to any other research participant.

_____ _____
(Date) (Signature - Participant)

_____ _____
(Date) (Signature - Investigator)

Appendix 3b: Research participant consent form - tavern manager

I, _____,
have been informed of the nature and purpose of this study. Specifically, I understand that the purpose of the study is to gain a fuller understanding of how the local rock music industry works, from the perspectives of amateur musicians, booking agents, and tavern managers, and that the study is being conducted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

I understand that I may be asked to participate in interviews with the investigator for research purposes. I grant my permission to the investigator to observe, as an audience member, the performances of musicians hired by this establishment for purposes of research. Finally, I grant permission for the interviewer to approach musicians hired by this establishment with the intent to gain their consent to act as participants in this research.

I acknowledge my right to, at any time, withdraw any part or all of my consent to participate in this study, and to withdraw permission for the investigator to conduct research on the premises of this establishment, without consequence. I further understand that no foreseeable direct benefits, and no direct or indirect harm, to myself, my place of business, its employees and its clients will be incurred through my participation in this study.

I have been informed that my right to privacy will be respected, and that I may decline from disclosing information at my discretion without consequence. Further, I understand that anonymity will be granted through the use of pseudonyms in any written documents and reports, published or unpublished. Finally, I recognize that information disclosed will be regarded as confidential, and will not be disclosed to any other research participant.

_____ _____
(Date) (Signature - Participant)

_____ _____
(Date) (Signature - Investigator)

Appendix 4: Content analysis form

Band Number _____
Member Number _____
Member Position_____

HAIR

Length (Longest):

bald _____
brush cut _____
above ear _____
half ear _____
bottom of ear _____
almost to shoulder _____
to shoulder _____
just past shoulders _____
upper chest _____
mid chest _____
navel _____
longer _____
other (describe):
_____
don't know (explain):
_____

Color:

black _____
dark brown _____
mousy brown _____
light brown _____
dark red _____
red _____
light red _____
white blond _____
light blond _____
golden blond _____
dark blond _____
colored/streaked_____
wet _____
other (describe):
_____
don't know (explain):
_____

**Bangs:**

none _____
receding hairline _____
pushed back _____
short straight down _____
short to side _____
other (specify):

_____

don't know (explain):

_____

**Style:**

straight _____
very slight curl _____
slight curl _____
medium curl _____
tight curl _____
frizzy _____
corn rows _____
other (specify):

_____

don't know (explain):

_____

**FACIAL AND BODY HAIR**

chest hair visible _____
mustache _____
goatee
    slight _____
    medium _____
    full _____
stubble _____
beard and mustache
    slight _____
    medium _____
    full _____
sideburns _____
beard
    slight _____
    medium _____
    full _____
other (specify):

_____

don't know (explain):

_____

**RACE**

caucasian _____
oriental _____
black _____
hispanic _____
other (specify):
_____
don't know (explain):
_____

**BODY TYPE**

slim _____
medium build _____
large build _____
noticeably overweight_____
noticeably muscular _____
other (specify):
_____
don't know (explain):
_____

**DRESS**

Jacket _____
color _____
pattern _____
material _____
style _____
length _____
other (specify):_____

Blazer _____
color _____
length _____
other (specify):_____

Shirt _____
no shirt _____
t-shirt _____
blank/logo (describe)_____
tank top _____
sleeveless _____
open full _____
partial _____
slight _____
loose/tucked in_____
length _____
color _____
shirt tied around waist_____
layered shirts _____

lumberjack _____

Pants
- tight/loose _____
- color _____
- blue jeans _____
  - light/dark _____
- spandex _____
- belted _____
- style _____
- shorts _____
  - length _____
  - style _____
- sweat pants _____
  - length _____
- holes _____
- other (specify): _____

Shoes
- boots _____
  - style _____
  - height _____
- color _____
- shoes _____
  - style _____
  - height _____
- other (specify): _____

Gloves _____
- describe

_____

Headband _____
- describe

_____

Hat _____
- describe

_____

Scarf _____
- location _____
- type _____
- color _____
- other (specify): _____

Vest _____
- type _____
- color _____
- other (specify): _____

Tie _____
type _____
location _____
color _____
other (specify):_____

Jewellery
necklace _____
number _____
style _____
length _____
ring _____
number _____
style _____
bracelet _____
number _____
style _____
earrings _____
left/right_____
number _____
describe: _____

Glasses _____
Sunglasses _____
Ear Plugs _____
Wrist Band _____
describe _____
Tape on Fingers_____
Tattoos _____
number _____
describe _____

Other (describe):
_____
Don't know (explain):
_____

**PROPS:**

Specify and Describe:
_____
_____

**SHOT LOCATION:**

Specify and Describe:
_____
_____

**POSES/POSTURES:**

Specify and Describe:

_____

_____

**FACIAL EXPRESSION:**

no smile/serious _____
slight smile _____
smile _____
laugh _____
frown _____
raised eyebrows _____
'expressive' (describe):

_____
on stage (singing etc) _____
other (specify):

_____
don't know (explain):

_____

Appendix 5: Selected content analysis results

| Topic: | Rank: | % Commercial (n) | % Tavern (n) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | N=69 | N=30 |
| Hair length | #1 upper chest | 30.4 (21) | 36.6 (11) |
| | #2 mid chest | 27.5 (19) | 26.6 ( 8) |
| | | N=75 | N=31 |
| Hair color | #1 brown | 40.0 (30) | 64.5 (20) |
| | #2 black | 28.0 (21) | 22.6 (7) |
| | | N=73 | N=33 |
| Hair style | #1 curl | 65.8 (48) | 63.6 (21) |
| | #2 straight | 24.7 (18) | 33.6 (11) |
| | | N=75 | N=34 |
| Mustache | | 9.3 ( 7) | 5.9 ( 2) |
| Sideburns | | 13.3 (10) | 8.8 ( 3) |
| Goatee | | 12.0 ( 9) | 2.9 ( 1) |
| Stubble | | 21.3 (16) | 26.5 ( 9) |
| | | N=70 | N=32 |
| Body type | #1 medium | 48.6 (34) | 56.3 (18) |
| | #2 slim | 47.1 (33) | 40.6 (13) |
| | | N=75 | N=34 |
| Jacket | | 28.0 (21) | 20.6 ( 7) |
| Blazer | | 8.0 ( 6) | 8.8 ( 3) |
| | | N=21 | N=7 |
| Black jacket | | 61.9 (13) | 71.4 ( 5) |
| Leather jacket | | 28.6 ( 6) | 57.1 ( 4) |
| Denim jacket | | 23.8 ( 5) | 28.6 ( 2) |
| | | N=71 | N=31 |
| Shirt | | 88.7 (63) | 9 3 . 5 |
| (29) | | N=63 | N=29 |
| T-shirt | | 44.4 (28) | 44.8 (13) |
| Shirt partially open | | 20.6 (13) | 20.6 ( 6) |
| Shirt loose | | 53.2 (25) | 50.0 ( 6) |
| Black shirt | | 46.0 (29) | 42.1 ( 8) |
| | | N=56 | N=23 |
| Jeans | | 57.1 (32) | 56.5 (13) |
| Shorts | | 7.1 ( 4) | 34.8 ( 8) |
| Visible Footwear | | N=17 | N=10 |
| Shoes | | 29.4 ( 5) | 30.0 ( 3) |
| Boots | | 70.6 (12) | 70.0 ( 7) |
| | | N=12 | N=7 |
| Army boots | | 33.3 ( 4) | 28.6 ( 2) |
| Western boots | | 58.3 ( 7) | 71.4 ( 5) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | N=75 | N=34 |
| Necklace(s) | | 46.6 (35) | 50.0 (17) |
| | | N=35 | N=17 |
| | one necklace | 60.0 (21) | 52.9 ( 9) |
| | two necklaces | 22.9 ( 8) | 35.3 ( 6) |
| | pendent(s) | 74.3 (26) | 58.8 (10) |
| | | N=26 | N=10 |
| | cross pendent | 46.2 (12) | 50.0 ( 5) |
| | | N=50 | N=17 |
| Rings | | 46.0 (23) | 35.3 ( 6) |
| | | N=23 | N= 6 |
| | one ring | 52.2 (12) | 66.7 ( 4) |
| | two rings | 21.7 ( 5) | 33.3 ( 2) |
| | | N=59 | N=21 |
| Bracelet(s) | | 42.4 (25) | 42.9 ( 9) |
| | | N=25 | N= 9 |
| | one Bracelet | 44.0 (11) | 77.0 ( 7) |
| | | N=40 | N= 9 |
| Earrings | | 35.0 (14) | 44.4 ( 4) |
| | | N=75 | N=34 |
| Facial expression | #1 serious | 62.7 (47) | 64.7 (22) |
| | #2 slight smile | 14.7 (11) | 17.6 ( 6) |